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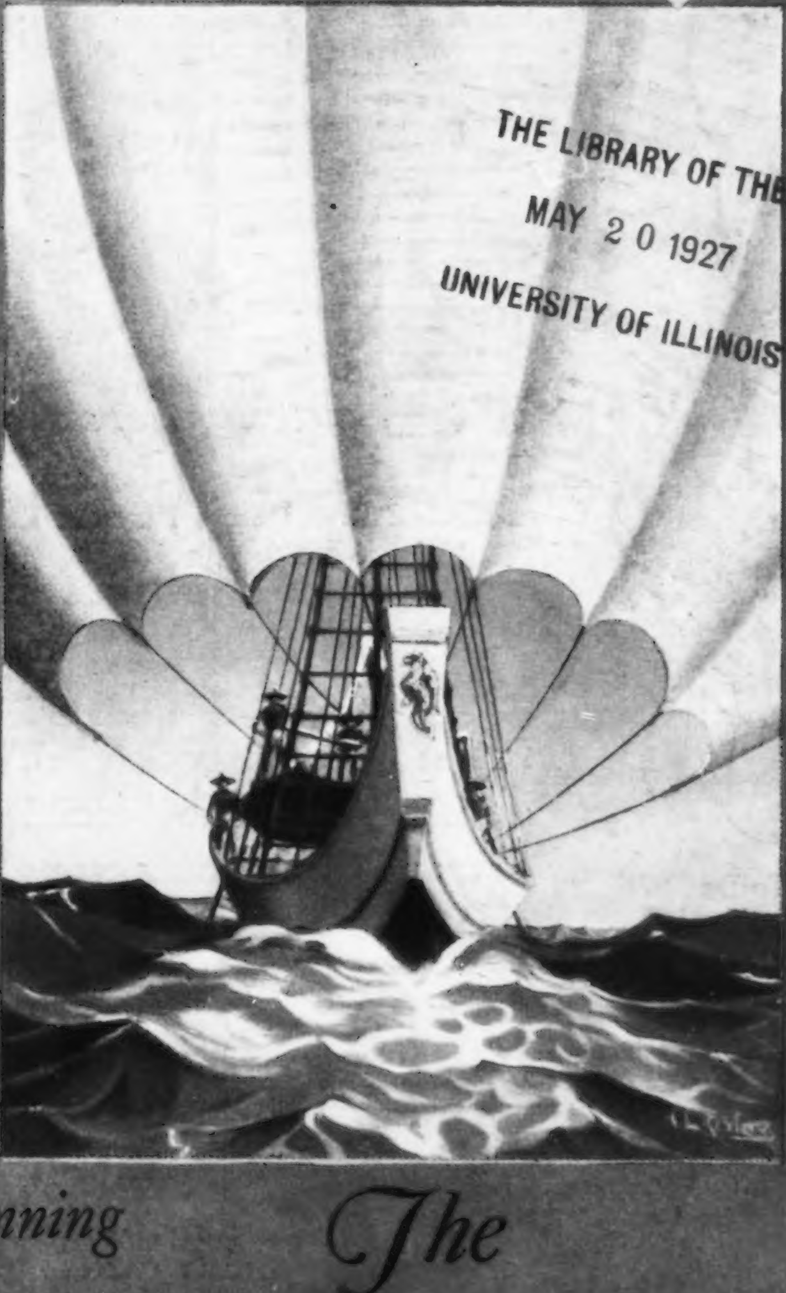

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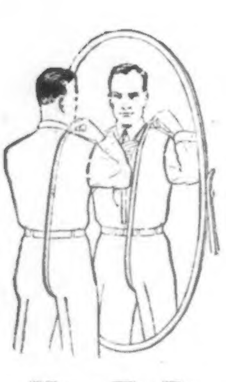

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June, 1927
Vol. LVI No. 6

Everybody's

OSCAR GRAEVE
Editor

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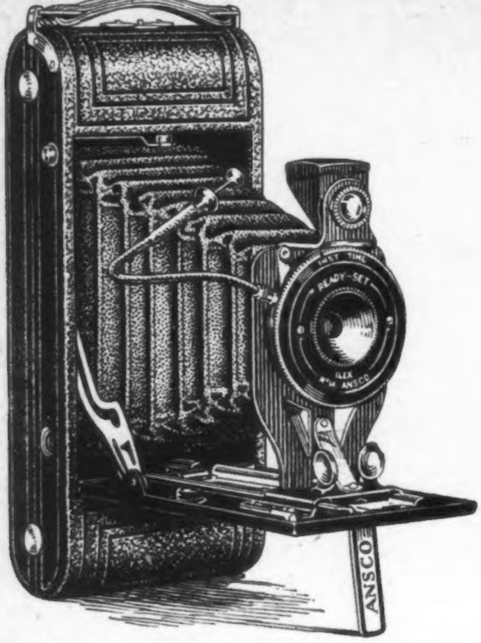

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Everybody's Now Presents
A New Novel of the
South Seas' Enchantment

The Dangerous Isles

By BASIL CAREY

Beginning on the next page

BASIL CAREY is a pen name and I haven't the slightest idea who Basil Carey is. The novel came into our editorial offices from an American literary agent who, in turn, had received it from an English literary agent. I tried to find out who the author was but met with the most evasive replies, although I was assured the novel was authentic. Yet despite this mystery, I found *The Dangerous Isles* an absorbing, colorful story. As I hope you will.

The Editor.

Beginning

The D*angerous* I*sles*

By BASIL CAREY

CHAPTER I

"I'M SICK of waitin' about for Donovan," said Pettigrew.

He lay sprawled on the deck of the *Anna*. His fat, good-natured face wore an expression of petulant anxiety. He looked at Morgan's impassive face and looked away. He could never tell what Morgan was thinking. He cut himself a fresh plug and began to chew meditatively. Presently he rolled over and sat up. Away on the port beam he could see a smudge that was Amanu. For three days the *Anna* had hung about, waiting for Donovan's boat, the *Spindrift*, and there was no sign of her.

"The Islands ain't what they were. These laws 'bout rum and the natives, and one thing and another—what's the sense of 'em anyway? Thirty-one years I've been in these parts—here before you were born, eh?—and what with missionaries and by-laws we might as well be in Wapping."

His red face grew gloomy, and he uncrossed his short legs with a sigh. In his twinkling deep-set eyes was a look of real concern. It was queer that Donovan didn't come. The two others had sailed a day ahead to pick up divers at Amanu. Southeast of Amanu Donovan was to join them. Yet for three days they had waited and still not a sign of the *Spindrift* with a triumphant Donovan on board.

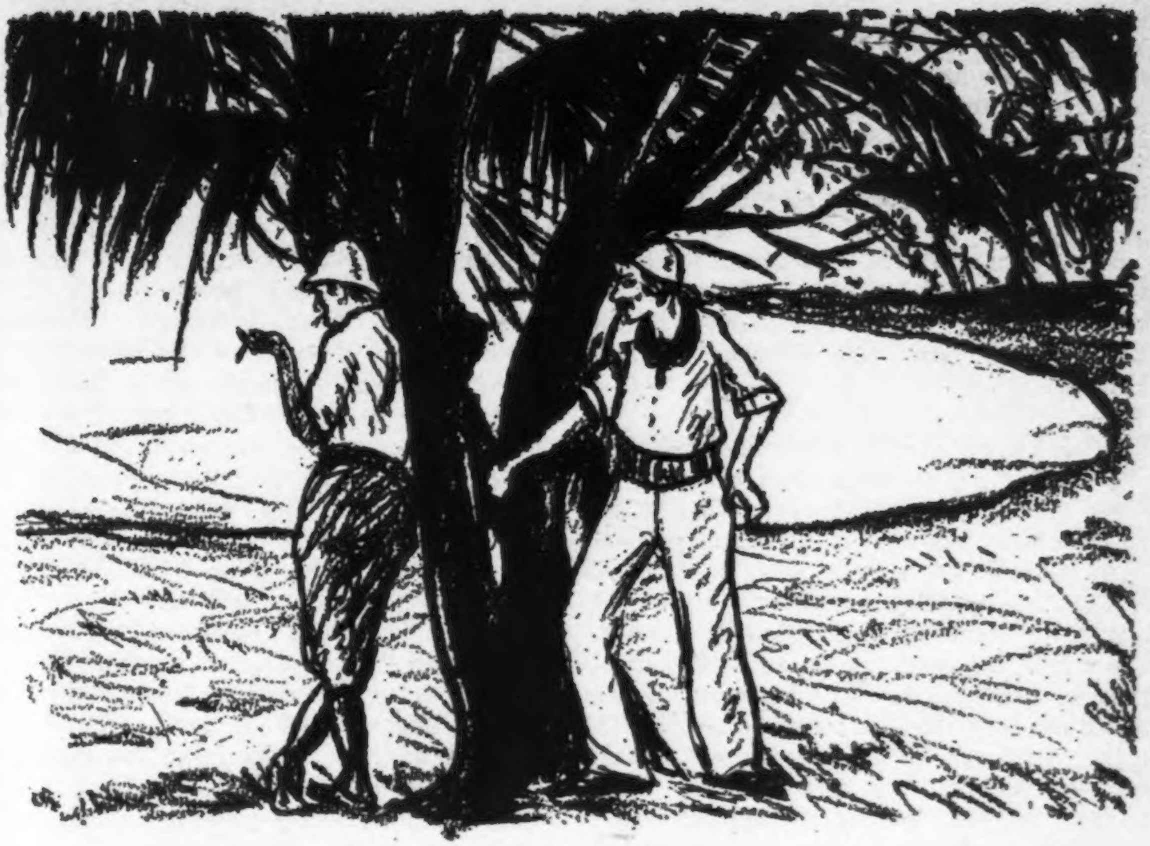
Pettigrew shouted an order to shorten sail and the chattering Kanakas sprang to do his bidding. Morgan lifted his great body from the meager shade of the cabin head and began pacing up and down restlessly. He was very tall, with muscles tough and strong as whipcord. For six years he had sailed among the Islands, three years on his own, three years with Donovan and Pettigrew. The three had agreed very well. "'Tis a broth of a boy he is wid his black hair an' gray eyes," Donovan used to say admiringly to Pettigrew. "An' do ye mark his wide shouthers and the great arms of him? 'Tis a grand fighter he'll make, when there's need."

Where was Donovan?

MORGAN came to a sudden stop in his uneasy prowling. He avoided Pettigrew's eyes, but the same thought had struck them both. It was Morgan who voiced their common fear.

"What could happen to him?" he demanded truculently.

"Several things," said Pettigrew. "I'll



tell you one of them. The same thing that came to the *Flying Fish* when old John Thurlow took her down to Kikia with a load of copra. You remember how it was? They sailed out of Wakatea one fine day and that's the last that was heard of them. Not a body, not a plank, not a spar ever seen again. The sea had them. They're gone. And do you mind the captain of the *Mary Rose*—found in the ship's longboat after twenty-nine days, and dead before he could tell what had happened?"

"You're scared," Morgan told him.

"I am. There's queer things happen in these parts. The Kanakas have made such a fuss about their bloomin' devils that the devils have got kind of real and solidified. Grin if you like. That's my idea anyway."

"The only solid devil that I've met is Stewart," said Morgan. "He looked black enough when we passed the *Swallow*, coming out of Wakatea. Did you tell anyone we were after pearls?" he demanded abruptly.

Pettigrew shifted uneasily from one foot to the other.

"Aw, no," he said at last. "No one at all, barrin' Bill Hennessey over in Wakatea when we were treatin' each other."

"What did you say to him?"

"Aw, nothin' at all. He enquired if we were still carryin' copra, and I told him no. By and by, after we'd had a few more, he says careless-like, 'Pearlin' this season?' and I wink and say maybe so."

"Did you tell him where we were going?"

"I don't remember for sure. Besides, if I did tell him we were goin' to Taukura, he wouldn't know where it was. Donovan found that island by chance. He made a chart of its bearings an' no one else knows where it is, so long as Donovan keeps the chart."

"Is that all?"

"That's all," said Pettigrew sulkily. But he would not meet Morgan's eyes.

"You cursed fool," said Morgan bitterly. "You got drunk, I suppose, and blabbed out everything we've been trying to hide. Donovan swears there are pearls at Taukura. If there are—if we're the first to prospect there for pearls and find them—we'll be made. If anyone else gets a hint—we're done. There are men who wouldn't stop at anything to get a sight of Donovan's chart. You know as well as I do that the pearling grounds between here and the Fijis are pretty well played out. A new place like Taukura that hasn't been dived would start a rush. You and I and Donovan are the only ones who know about it. You and I came on to Amanu to get divers. Donovan stays at Wakatea to get in stores. We do everything we can to make it look like an ordinary expedition—and then you go and spill it all to Bill Hennessey! What business had you to have one over the eight at a time like this? You fool, why can't you keep your head shut? Hennessey will tell Stewart, I'll bet. Ay, I'll bet Stewart knows."

THEY were silent, thinking of Stewart, scowling at them from the deck of the *Swallow* as they left Wakatea. Rat Stewart, the men of the islands called him. There were tales told of him in 'Frisco, in Bangkok, in Tahiti—tales that began with a laugh and ended in a shrug. They said he would hang himself at last, that he had kept his rat's neck out of the noose too long already. But he laughed at them, and was up and away on a fresh venture before they had finished their angry talk. No man called himself Stewart's friend. Yet few cared to have him as an enemy. If he should learn that in Donovan's possession was the chart of Taukura—

"You fool," said Morgan again, "if Stewart gets to know, anything might happen. And he landed in Wakatea before Donovan left."

His deep-set gray eyes flashed angrily as Pettigrew sputtered a defence.

"Oh, shut up," he said, and went aft, leaving the other still protesting.

Pettigrew went below and sat sulkily in the little stateroom. Presently he reached for a pack of greasy cards and dealt imaginary poker hands, muttering softly to himself. Of course Morgan was young and the young always jump to conclusions. Sometimes they jump beyond them and get in a mess. To hear Morgan talk, anybody would think that Stewart was lying up for Donovan and the cursed chart. Still, it would be comforting to know what Donovan was doing. Three, nearly four days late. He wasn't the kind to go on the spree at such a time. Too old and steady. Well, then, where was he?

On deck, Morgan considered grimly. Whatever happened, they must find Donovan. Coming from Wakatea he would have to skirt Kahina and its treacherous reefs. Perhaps there had been an accident. The *Spindrift* was a heavy boat to handle in a wind and Donovan had not a full crew, meaning to fill up with the Amanu divers who were taking up so much space on the *Anna*. Resolutely, he put thoughts of Stewart at the back of his mind. Absurd to let a supposition alarm him. Besides, Donovan wasn't a babe in arms. He'd knocked about the Islands for nearly thirty years, and knocked pretty hard. He wasn't a fool like Pettigrew. Morgan frowned as he thought of the mess Pettigrew might have made. He'd have to warn Donovan when they met. The first opportunity he had, he would take him aside and tell him that they would both have to keep an eye on Pettigrew. He was a child where the bottle was concerned. Donovan would have to speak to him. He always listened to Donovan.

Barefooted, Morgan made no sound as he went down the companion to find Pettigrew. For a moment he watched the gnarled fingers that caressed the cards. The third finger of the left hand was missing. He had heard the story—love and a dark night in Tahiti, twenty years ago, when Pettigrew was young enough to be jealous and fool enough to believe in a woman. Morgan smiled as he remembered how the tale gained each time it was told. He went in and stood by Pettigrew.

"The wind's freshening. How would it be if we put about and went back toward Kahina? He'd have to come that way anyhow."

"Oh, if you like," grumbled Pettigrew. "But seems to me you're raisin' Cain a bit early. When you've lived in these parts as long as I have—"

"I've lived here long enough to be sure that something's up," interrupted Morgan. "Donovan ought to be here. I'm going to look for him."

Pettigrew grunted.

Morgan went on deck again, and put the *Anna* about with her head southwest toward Kahina. He planned to reach the ring of islands that surrounded Kahina in a day and a half. If there were no signs of Donovan then they would go direct to Wakatea and make enquiries there.

THE Pacific night fell as though someone had driven the sun into a pen and shut the door on him. The wind sang in the rigging as the *Anna* sped onward toward Kahina. Morgan, looking up at the stars, wondered incessantly about Donovan, and called himself a fool for worrying. He had the same restlessness, the indefinable uneasiness, that he had felt before the Maitland affair in Tahiti. He remembered, as if it were yesterday, the queer feeling that had made him find Maitland and beg him not to go in town that night. Maitland had laughed and gone off whistling. His murderers were caught next day and hanged. . . . Morgan shivered, remembering the smile on Maitland's dead face. Suppose—suppose he were to find Donovan like that. . . . He laughed at himself. But it was an uneasy laugh.

Just after sunrise they met and passed the *Marie Linden,* sailing from Kahina with a load of copra. Morgan hailed her and shouted an enquiry. The skipper, a stout man oddly reminiscent of a walrus, replied in guttural Dutch and shook his head when they repeated "*Spindrift*—Wakatea—*Spindrift,*" over and over again. Plainly they could get no help from him. The distance between the vessels increased, but for a long time they could see him shaking his head mournfully and throwing out his arms in queer awkward gestures of apology.

"No use," said Morgan dejectedly.

"Don't worry," advised Pettigrew. "Donovan must be hereabouts. We'll find him all right."

They found him next day.

TOWARD noon the Kanaka look-out waved his hand excitedly and shouted. Morgan snatched up the glass and hurried on deck. It was a calm day, with just enough breeze to send the *Anna* lazily on her way. All morning Pettigrew had cursed at the sudden drop in the wind. Morgan put up the glass and made out a ship to leeward. She was derelict, and her decks were awash. He looked again, but could see no sign of life.

"Well?" said Pettigrew impatiently.

"Derelict," Morgan told him. "Funny, isn't it? She can't have been there long and there's been no storm. Wonder how she got there?"

"Is she driftin'?"

"No, she's not drifting. To my mind, she's caught on one of these reefs. Kahina's a cursed ugly place. Looks to me as if she's aground, somehow. Otherwise she'd have sunk by now. Decks all awash."

He handed the glass to Pettigrew.

"She's in a bad way," was Pettigrew's opinion. "No need to waste time visitin' her, anyway. She won't be there tomorrow, and there's not a soul aboard. Water's all round the deckhouse. Wonder who she is?"

Suddenly he gave an exclamation, and thrust the glass into Morgan's hands. His ruddy face had turned chalky. His voice came choked and husky.

"That deckhouse . . . there's a plank that's a different color from the rest. Do you remember how the *Spindrift's* deckhouse got bashed about and Donovan mended it with a rough board."

They stood staring at each other. Morgan knew instinctively that Pettigrew had guessed right. He remembered helping Donovan with that plank. He glanced at Pettigrew.

"I'm going to see," he said. "We'll make sure. Even—even if it is the *Spindrift,* Donovan's not there. No, you needn't come. Don't be a fool, we needn't both go. And the *Anna* can't get in any closer. These damned reefs will get us if we're not careful. Kaoro," he called to one of the boys, "we go see wreck. Suppose you not quick get longboat, you get damn good hiding."

Pettigrew protested in vain.

"Maybe it ain't the *Spindrift.*"

"Maybe it's not, but I'm going to see. It's queer that a boat should be just there. She wasn't here last week and there's been no storm since. I'll be back in about an hour."

He was over the side and Pettigrew watched the longboat growing smaller in the distance. He waited till they reached the derelict, then went below and poured himself out a stiff whiskey. He gulped it down and sat quite still, full of a nameless dread of what Morgan might bring back. If anything had happened to Donovan—

MORGAN'S fears were well founded. The wreck was the *Spindrift.* She was water-logged and in imminent danger of sinking. Apparently she was balanced on a razor-edge reef, and any sudden movement would send her to the bottom. The boat drew alongside and Morgan stepped out on the deck. The water reached his knees as he strode aft, puzzled and suspicious. How had it all come about? The sails were reefed and in order. He peered down the flooded companion. No help there. No help from the open hatches. Perhaps the deckhouse held the secret. He tried the door. It resisted.

It took the united strength of himself and two Kanakas to force it open.

Inside the deckhouse they found Donovan.

He was huddled in a curious attitude, his head down on his knees, his arms hanging slackly. Morgan judged he had been dead a couple of days. His clothes were torn to shreds and his gun was missing. He had been stabbed.

Morgan and the Kanakas stood staring at him, till Kaoro burst into a wail of terror. Morgan knocked him backward into the green water, and bade the other boy help him with the dead body. But he had reckoned without the native fear of death.

In vain he swore, urged, threatened. His four Kanakas refused resolutely. Unaided he grappled with Donovan's body and lifted it on his shoulder. Lurching heavily, he splashed across the watery deck and laid it in the longboat. He took a piece of sailcloth and wrapped it clumsily about the body. He went back and made a hasty search of the deckhouse. There was no sign of the chart that had cost Donovan his life. He paused and ran his fingers over the wood, noting where a bullet had grazed it. Who had killed Donovan?

An idea struck him. He called to Tain, a Wakatea boy, and made him dive close down by the *Spindrift*. Twice he went down and twice came up, shaking his head. The third time, as Morgan was getting anxious, he came up, with a look of triumph on his contorted face. When he had gasped some air into his lungs, Morgan said impatiently, "Well?"

"Find her," he said. "One fella damn big hole."

Morgan nodded. It was as he had expected. The Kanakas pushed off sullenly, fearful of the nearness of that silent thing. Morgan sat with folded arms, his mind a whirl of emotions. There was regret for the friend he had liked and trusted; anger at the frustration of their plans by the loss of the chart; finally and above all, conquering every other thought, a savage hatred of the murderer and a determination to kill him with his own hands. The sight of Pettigrew, tense and breathless, waiting for him, increased his rage. What would Pettigrew say, what would he do when he saw Donovan? At last he could bear the sight of that motionless figure no longer. He turned away and stared at the diminishing patch that marked where the *Spindrift* rocked perilously.

PETTIGREW had seen the heap under the sailcloth. He knew what it was. His eyes never left it as it was carried on deck and laid down. He was trembling when Morgan looked at him at last.

"Is it—?" he breathed.

"Ay," said Morgan harshly. "It's him. Dead these two or three days I should guess. Here," as Pettigrew went to lift the sailcloth, "let him be. Won't do you any good to look at him."

"Maybe not," retorted Pettigrew grimly, lifting the edge.

He dropped it at last.

"The chart?"

"Gone," said Morgan. "Without a doubt someone killed him to get that same chart. He was all bunched up in a corner of the deckhouse. There's been a fight. His gun's gone. He used it though. There's the mark of a bullet on the wood. Blood about, too."

"He wasn't shot."

"No. Knifed. And knifed clean. Whoever killed him knew his work damned well. No need to strike twice."

"One of his boys—"

"No. Donovan was a match for any native. This was white men. There must have been more than one. Donovan was a hefty chap."

"You didn't find anything?"

Slowly Morgan pulled from his pocket a small object. It lay shining and sinister on his broad palm.

"Earring?" queried Pettigrew. "Where did you get it?"

"He was holding it betwen his finger and thumb. I had a job to take it from him."

They examined the earring carefully. It was of unfamiliar workmanship, of an elegance foreign to the coarse ornaments affected by the common seafarer. A minute and exquisite pattern of leaves had been traced on the gold. It was bent as though it had been wrenched off during a struggle. Morgan eyed it thoughtfully.

"If we can find a man with a single earring," he mused, "of course it would be as easy as pie. But no one would be such a fool as to go around with only one. He'd be a marked man. Guess his ear got torn, though. That ought to be a bit of help."

"How'd she get on the reef, do you suppose?" enquired Pettigrew listlessly.

"She's been scuttled. Tain found the hole. I'll tell you what I think. I reckon someone knew about the chart and stalked Donovan. There must have been a fight—at night-time, I should say. When they'd got what they wanted they scuttled the ship. If she hadn't happened to drift on that reef before she sank, we might have been waiting about for her still."

"And the chart's gone."

"Whoever stole Donovan's chart is well ahead by now. We're likely to find a superior collection of empty shells when we hit Taukura. What'll we do about Donovan?" he ended abruptly.

"I'd like to take him back to Wakatea, and—"

"We can't do that. It's no use raising hell about this. . . . Whoever did it supposes the *Spindrift* to have sunk. That's what makes me think they did it at night, and sailed away when she began to fill without waiting to make sure." He looked down at his hand. "This earring—" he said.

"It's not much clue."

"Not much. Only it's a bit different from ordinary ones. This isn't junk. It's good. The kind a man who's struck it rich might wear."

"Stewart, f'r instance."

Morgan shook his head.

"Doesn't wear earrings."

PETTIGREW bent his brows in a painful effort to remember something. Morgan waited, tossing the earring idly from hand to hand. The sun was sloping down the sky, and the shadows across the deck lengthened. A breeze sprang up, bellying out the sails, and lifting a corner of Donovan's covering. It blew it aside, and ran light fingers over his graying hair. Still Pettigrew sat, hunched up, his knees drawn up to his chin, his slow brain trying to fit the pieces of the puzzle. He had a hazy memory of a face—a face at Marty's one night last April when they were talking about Bill Rogers and the *Yellow Jasmine*—a hot breathless night, and a dark face—

He slapped his thigh.

"Lamotte," he said.

Morgan echoed the name.

"You think—"

"He wore them one night in Wakatea. A big chap with dark eyes. Shifty, I thought him. He was at Marty's. You weren't there. They say he's wanted back in France."

"Frenchie?"

"Half. He's dark enough to be a dago, anyway. I've seen him twice. That time was once, and the other—"

"The other," prompted Morgan.

"Makin' love," said Pettigrew laconically. "Where are you goin'?"

Morgan looked down at him and glanced at Donovan.

"Some weights—" he said.

AFTER Donovan had left the *Anna* to the accompaniment of a few mumbled words that Pettigrew remembered from the Prayer Book, the ship headed west for Wakatea. The stores had been on the *Spindrift* and it was necessary to return and lay in a fresh supply. It was impossible to set out for Taukura, two hundred miles due south, with the little that the *Anna* carried. On the second day after leaving the *Spindrift* they heard the roar of the surf on the reef of Wakatea. They waited impatiently as the longboat swung over the side into the dancing water. Off they shot, with Tain in the bows, his bright, dark eyes fixed on the opening, his lips already forming the words that would give the signal for them to dash through at the psychological moment. On his cleverness depended the lives of all in the boat. The slightest error in judgment would mean death. Yet the responsibility sat lightly on his brown shoulders. A hundred times he had steered Pettigua and Moriani—the nearest his tongue could get to their names—a hundred times had he brought them safe into the lagoons. Should he fail, then, at this well-remembered Wakatea? Assuredly not. He flung up his head and shouted. There was a swift rush and then the placid clearness of the lagoon.

CHAPTER II

MARTY, the storekeeper, came out to greet them. He had seen the *Anna* and hurried down to the beach to find out what news she brought. He was a stout man, with shrewd little eyes set in an impassive face. He had been a grocer in London in his youth and traces of his apprenticeship still showed in his carefully brushed hair and perpetual white apron. He had been a bartender in New York, a billiard marker in 'Frisco, a theater attendant in Chicago. Drifting east again he came back to New York where he was in turn a vendor of hot waffles, an ice-cream seller, a boxing promoter—a very brief episode—a hairdresser, and a window-cleaner. He had served in a delicatessen. One winter he turned burglar. When the spring of that year came he sat in Battery Park and felt homesick. It came to him with a shock that he was forty-two years old and worth exactly nine dollars. That night he skulked about near the ships, meaning to stow away and get back to England. For two nights he watched and on the third he slunk aboard like a rat and crawled into the hold. He had spent his money on provisions, and calculated that he could hold out till they touched Liverpool. After æons of misery he heard the rattle of chains as the anchor fell and after a discreet interval he staggered on deck.

Instead of the gray docks of Liverpool he saw the white beach and tall palms of Wakatea. Blinking and dazed by the strong light, he could yet make out the new and startling blue of the sea. Obviously he had mistaken his ship in the darkness. He submitted passively as they dumped him into the longboat with much violence and a remarkable command of language. When they got into the lagoon, the mate kicked him overboard and hoped earnestly that the sharks would get him. Marty swam ashore with difficulty. After he had dried himself in the sun, he got up and looked at Wakatea.

"Guess I'll stay for a bit."

He had stayed for fifteen years.

He shaded his eyes with one fat, sunburnt hand, and looked anxiously into Morgan's face.

"Anything up?" he said briefly.

"Yes. Tell you by and by. We've come back for stores. Can we get 'em aboard before sundown? We want to start early tomorrow."

"Sure," said Marty, and led the way up the beach. For the next hour or so they were busy loading the boat. Tain had to make two journeys. Bill Hennessey strolled down to watch them. Monty Hawes of the *Southern Rose*, a sloop that traded between the islands, came and stared at them, openly curious. At last he could contain himself no longer.

"Taking in stores?"

"Oh, no," growled Pettigrew. "Me and Morgan is just fancyin' a little picnic by moonlight. Tain, go get bag, look all same this bag. Must have one two bags."

TAIN went away for another of the small sacks of flour that Marty kept on the third shelf. Pettigrew scowled at Monty Hawes.

"Thought Donovan stayed to take in stores," persisted Monty, his beady eyes fixed inquisitively on the load in the longboat.

Pettigrew did not answer. A bright idea struck Monty.

"Say," he volunteered, "you and Donovan parted, eh? Change of partnership, what?"

"You've hit it," Morgan told him grimly. "We've—parted. Anything more you'd like to know?"

Monty giggled fatuously.

"Plenty. What made you separate, huh? Been together ever since I can remember. When I saw the *Anna* coming in, I said—" He paused and caught Morgan's eye. "Oh, well, I must be gettin' on," he ended lamely, and sauntered off.

"That tame fish don't know much about it anyway," was Pettigrew's comment. "I thought you were goin' to eat him. Where's that lazy devil with the flour? Tain! Tain!"

Morgan wiped his forehead.

When the longboat went back to the *Anna* for the second time, Marty beckoned them into the store.

"Come on and have a drink," he told them. "What's it all about at all?"

He folded his fat arms and looked from one to the other with a question in his little deep-set eyes.

"Where's Donovan?" he asked.

"Dead."

"My God," said Marty, startled, "what killed him?"

"A knife."

"Whose?"

"That's what we're going to find out."

"Where's the *Spindrift?*"

"Scuttled."

"Why?"

"Donovan had the Taukura chart. Some one must have known that. You see, Donovan was about the only white who knew about Taukura. He was blown out of his course last year and hit on it by accident. He swears there are good pearling grounds there. Some one—the man who killed him—must have known about the chart. You couldn't find Taukura without it. It's a freak island, miles off any route."

Marty rubbed his chin.

"You're not a fool," he said to Morgan. "You don't blab. How could any one know?"

"Bill Hennessey knew."

"Who told him?"

"I did," said Pettigrew sullenly.

"You—"

"You don't need to say it. I've been sayin' it to myself for two days," interrupted Pettigrew.

There was silence for a space.

"Tell me about it," said Marty.

IT WAS Morgan who told him. When he came to the finding of the earring in Donovan's hand, he took the slim golden thing and balanced it on his finger. Marty eyed it thoughtfully.

"You know a fellow called Lamotte?" he asked at length.

"Ay, I thought of him," said Pettigrew. "But just 'cos he wears 'em, that ain't to say he killed Donovan. Plenty of men wear these things. Wore 'em myself once. The girls like 'em."

"All the same," said Marty, "Lamotte was in here 'bout six days ago, wearing a pair remarkable like that."

"He was, eh?"

A step sounded outside.

"That'll be Hennessey," said Marty without hesitation. "It's just his time for lookin' in. Why don't some one kidnap that mutt? He's been bummin' around Wakatea these two years and more. See here, Pettigrew, get out of him how much further—ay, come on, Bill. We were expectin' you."

Hennessey lurched into the store on unsteady legs. He was the gossip of the island, always full of the latest scandal. His pale, unhealthy face, with loose-lipped mouth and bulging blood-shot eyes, was a familiar sight to the frequenters of Marty's. He was entirely amiable and never quite sober.

"Come on in," urged Marty. "Here's Pettigrew home again."

"Good old Pettigrew," said Hennessey. "Best friend I've got. Very best friend. Have a drink, Pettigrew. Marty, you—you son-of-a-gun, fetch out bottle of whiskey. Paddy Ryan wouldn't give me any more."

"Been down to Paddy Ryan's?"

"Yes. Best friend I've got. Have a drink, Pettigrew."

He wrinkled his brow, deep in thought.

"You're not here," he said at last. "You've gone pearlin'. What've you come back for, eh? Where's Donovan?"

"We're settin' out again tomorrow. Had to come back for more stores. We're going a long way, you know."

Hennessey looked cunning.

"I know. Taukura."

"Ay, you're the boy to find things out," admired Marty. "Just fancy now. You and me are the only ones to know just where they're goin'. We're the only ones. . . . . Ain't that so?"

Hennessey nodded doubtfully.

"Yes," said Marty. "You and me, Bill, are the only ones that know. If any one can tell me another soul that knows, I'll stand him an extra tot."

"No one else knows," spoke Morgan suddenly.

"Oh yes, oh yes," burst out Bill, his eyes fixed on the glass that Marty held.

"Who, then?"

Hennessey looked from one to the other.

"Mustn't go any further," he said importantly. "If you hadn't said extra tot. . . . . No, mustn't go any further. Course not."

He dropped his voice.

"Stewart. Stewart knows. Told him in perfect confidence. My best—hic—friend he is, best friend I got."

He drank down the whiskey and Marty led him to the door and pushed him out with scant ceremony. They heard him singing maudlin songs as he staggered away to Paddy Ryan's to beg yet another mouthful.

THE three who were left sat silent. Presently Morgan said in a strained voice, "So Stewart knew."

"Stewart," echoed Pettigrew.

"I suppose you know Stewart and Lamotte are sailin' together?"

Marty's face was carefully devoid of expression. He reached for another cigar and lit it before looking at Morgan. When at last he raised his eyes Morgan's face startled him.

"Sailin' with Lamotte, is he?" ejaculated Pettigrew.

Morgan said nothing. He took out the earring again and studied it.

"If this belongs to Lamotte," he said at last, "and he and Stewart are sailing together, I reckon we needn't look very far for Donovan's murderers."

"And which of 'em struck the blow, now?" asked Marty, keenly.

"Stewart," said Morgan. "I'll bet on that. Lamotte may have been there, but I'll swear that Stewart did the work. This fellow Lamotte—"

He paused.

"I don't know him. But you do, Marty. Would he kill a man, do you think?"

"Shouldn't think he'd object," was Marty's opinion. "He's a tough, anyway. I've met his sort in New York. As a rule they don't kill for the killin's sake like Stewart does. They kill because they're afraid. But whoever held the knife, it was Stewart's brain at the back of it."

"And they'll be half way to Taukura by now."

"Nope." Marty rose and went to the door. "They're at Kikia now. Lamotte's sister is joinin' 'em there. She's been in New York with a guardian for a couple of years. Guardian's dead and she's comin' back to be with Lamotte. I reckon she don't know he's thrown in his fortune with Stewart. If you could get to Kikia before they start—"

"When's the Tahiti boat come in?"

"Due tomorrow night. I bet they're cursin' hard at not being able to start. Seems to me they just followed Donovan on the chance—and the chance proved too much for 'em. If it was me, I should try to catch them at Kikia—"

Morgan sprang to his feet.

"We'll have a damned good try, anyway."

Pettigrew was staring straight before him. His lips moved as though he were speaking to some one. When Morgan flung open the door and strode down the beach shouting for Tain, he still sat there, his head sunk on his chest. Marty roused him.

"Ay, I'm coming," he said. "You know, me and Donovan—we were—we were—"

Slowly he followed Morgan across the moonlit beach.

ON BOARD the *Swallow*, off Kikia, Stewart and Lamotte waited impatiently for the Tahiti mail boat. She was due before nightfall, and they strained their eyes for a smear of smoke to the northwest.

"Likely as not, she'll be late," fumed Lamotte. "It would be just our cursed luck."

His face was sullen with anger. He turned away from Stewart and fixed the glass on the horizon.

"You're in a funk," came Stewart's lazy drawl. "Yes, you are, Lamotte. It's the dago blood in you that's scared."

"*Sacre!*" said Lamotte, "I have an instinct that this is going to be an unfortunate affair. Donovan died so quickly. It was not natural for any man to die so quickly. I did not like it at the time. One thrust—and so little blood. He died without a sound."

"How long before Morgan finds out, I wonder?"

"How should he find out?" retorted Lamotte. "We left no traces."

Stewart shook his head.

"The *Spindrift* was filling fast, I know," said Lamotte. "Somehow I'd feel easier if we'd stayed around till she was clean gone. What do you reckon they'll do, eh?"

"Why," surmised Stewart, "maybe they're still waitin' for Donovan. Anyway, who cares about them? What I say is, why worry till the bullets start flying? If we can get the Taukura pearls, we're made. Donovan was a mighty sure man, and if he guessed there were pearls there, I'll bet they are. You know, pearling's not what it was. Thirty years ago a man stood a decent chance of cleaning up a pile from one lagoon. There was plenty then. But folks got careless—didn't throw back the spawn, didn't allow the pearls time to mature. Seven years it wants—"

"You are quite mad about pearls," commented Lamotte.

Stewart shrugged his shoulders. Lamotte knew, then, of the lure which the pearls had for him. Beneath the ostensible motive of gain lay a strange, unexplained lust—the lust that compels a man to seek gold because it is gold, and not because of the things it will buy. Stewart loved the white roundness of the shining pearls. In them he saw the quintessence of beauty. He hungered for them, he dreamed of their pale purity. For them he had lied and fought and—killed.

Lamotte was whining again.

"Donovan died so quietly. I can see him now, slipping down so gently. He sat there on the floor as if he was tired."

"Shut up," said Stewart savagely. "You're always harping on it. Forget it, man, forget it!"

Lamotte subsided, muttering. He was taller than Stewart, though his muscles lacked the steel that made the other such a dangerous adversary. Stewart was master, and Lamotte knew it. He saw the mockery in the hazel eyes and thin lips, and he turned away. Both knew that one day there must come a trial of strength. Between them was a subtle hatred, born of the ties of shared knowledge which bound them together.

JUST after mid-day the Tahiti boat was sighted. They reckoned that with luck she would land her passengers under an hour. They went ashore to await her coming. For certain reasons Stewart had no desire to take the *Swallow* out to meet her. He wondered idly what sort of girl Lamotte's sister would prove. It was bad luck that they had to wait about for her. He hoped she would turn out worth waiting for. Pretty? Perhaps. Lamotte was not much to look at, he reflected. The big man's face was heavy and of a sullen cast. His black hair and eyes made his sallow skin appear more yellow than it was by nature His thick, sensual lips and weak chin gave the key to his whole character. Here was a man, decided Stewart, in a moment of penetration, who could be ruled by an appeal to his appetites, when all else failed. He stored this in his memory for use on the occasion which would surely arise. He wondered whether Lamotte had the makings of a rogue or a fool. Impossible to be both, concluded Stewart, because it takes a clever man to be a rascal.

"What's your sister called?"

"How you startled me!" said Lamotte querulously. "I wish you wouldn't shoot out things like that. My sister? Valerie."

"Valerie."

Stewart rolled the word thoughtfully on his tongue. His expression grew ruminative. Presently he became aware that Lamotte was looking at him with hostile eyes.

"You will leave my sister alone," he said meaningly. He knew Stewart's proclivities.

"Certainly I shall leave her alone," returned the other indifferently. "Am I one to run after the women?"

"You have had many *affaires*," Lamotte reminded him.

"Of course I have," Stewart retorted. "And you?"

"We're not talking about me. You may laugh and pass it off, but take care. I am very fond of Valerie."

"You seem to think," Stewart said, "that it is all my doing when the women smile at me. But let me tell you—"

He plunged into anecdote, and Lamotte listened greedily, his nostrils slightly distended, his restless hands busy with a piece of knotted cord.

WHEN the mail landed her passengers, Lamotte watched eagerly. Presently he made his way through the chattering throng. Stewart saw him lift a girl in his great arms and kiss her soundly. He cleared a way for her and they came toward Stewart, both talking eagerly. Behind them trailed a couple of Kanakas, laden with a trunk and various baggage. Stewart did not go forward. He stood up and waited until the little procession reached him. Beaming with pride, Lamotte introduced them.

"Val, this is Stewart, my partner. This is my sister Valerie."

Stewart bowed and Val held out her hand frankly. He took it, and they looked at each other, half-smiling. Val saw a slim man of middle height, whose clean-cut features gave her a sense of hidden power. The grip of his hand intensified this impression. She had a feeling that there was a man who could bend others to do his bidding against their own will. For a fleeting moment she had a sensation that was almost fear. It passed, and she was answering Lamotte's questions about the voyage.

Stewart's first thought was, "Proud as hell." The poise of her head and the set of her shoulders told him that. It was corroborated by her determined little chin. She was dark haired like her brother, with a clear, pale skin, and full red lips. Her eyes were not dark, as he had expected. They were gray, the pure cold gray of a northern sky in winter. Her body was very slim, and her movements reminded him of a graceful boy. In her voice was a slight huskiness that allured the ear. Stewart found himself listening intently as she chattered away to her brother. He frowned when Lamotte interrupted her.

"You shall tell me all about it presently. Listen to me for one moment. Our plans have been altered at the last hour. The *Swallow* sails today—yes, now—for pearling grounds a long way off. I have arranged for you to stay with some people named Renfrew. You will like Mrs. Renfrew. Her husband is the district—"

"I'm coming with you."

"But you can't," protested Lamotte. "Don't be ridiculous. It's impossible."

"Why?"

"We're going into a dangerous expedition. We may be gone some weeks. Besides—"

"Well?"

"It's impossible," said Lamotte again. "Why, you'd be the only woman on board. This is going to be a man's job. It's not a bit of use arguing."

"*I'm* not arguing," retorted Val. "I'm coming."

He looked helplessly at Stewart.

But Stewart was caught by a vision of long days at sea beguiled by the witchery of this saucy tongue. Val did not look at him again, and the pique he felt was rapidly changing into that desire for mastery which ruled so many of his actions. He had a sudden desire to conquer this defiant slip of womanhood. His quick mind envisaged the subtle delights of a siege. Lamotte. . . . . ? Lamotte could be soothed, hoodwinked. It was not he who would present the difficulty.

"You see," persisted Lamotte. "You must stay here with Mrs. Renfrew until we return. Stewart thinks as I do."

"On the contrary," said Stewart.

"What?"

Lamotte's jaw dropped.

"If Miss Lamotte will accompany us," said Stewart smoothly, "we will do all in our power to make her comfortable. But you must be prepared for a rough time," he added to Val.

She flashed a sparkling glance at him.

"You can't scare me," she told him.

He smiled back at her.

"I'm not so sure," he said.

He saw the anger in Lamotte's eyes and drew him aside.

"You fool, why did you tell her we were going after pearls? And then leave her here to be pumped by that Renfrew woman? Man, you're crazy!"

"If I tell her not to say anything—"

Stewart gave him a look of supreme contempt.

"You poor fish!"

Lamotte winced.

"Well, I am not a cynic like you. I know what you think—that no woman can be trusted. You are wrong. My sister—"

Stewart cut him short.

"I say that it is safest for her to be with us. You have told her too much."

Their eyes met in a challenge. At last Lamotte's fell. He turned to Valerie.

"Very well," he said grudgingly.

BUT Val was not listening. She was watching the sails of a boat that had crept up unnoticed by the three of them. She pointed to it, asking an eager question. Lamotte stifled an exclamation.

"It is the *Anna*," he said.

"What?"

Stewart spun round and shaded his eyes with his hand. There could be no doubt of it. Too well he knew the cut of her jib. She lay outside the lagoon and he could see that they were lowering the longboat. He glanced at Lamotte. Would this fool destroy everything in the encounter that was inevitable? Useless to attempt an escape. How much did they know? What had they found that had sent them headlong to Kikia? He could hear no answer save the lazy roar of the surf on the reef. His boys were grouped round one of their number who had been indulging in surreptitious libations of Kava. He was laughing back at them, waving drunken hands. Even when Stewart shouted, he stood swaying stupidly. One of them, Kaoha, came running.

"You go find Pereira, bring him damn quick. Suppose you no find before Moriani (Morgan) come, you tell him wait."

He went back to Lamotte.

"What'll they do?"

"That's easy. The question is, what do they know?"

"I'll bet that cursed deckhouse broke loose and they've struck it somewhere," said Lamotte bitterly. "They must know—look here, I'll take my sister up to Mrs. Renfrew's for a rest and tell her not to mention anything we've said."

Stewart watched the two of them walk away, and looked anxiously round for signs of Pereira. In his mind the question was running carelessly: How did Morgan guess? He saw the long-boat shoot through the opening in the reef, and heard Tain's shout of triumph. On it came, till it touched the sand with a grating noise.

Stewart heard a convulsive sound behind him. Lamotte had returned.

"Don't you talk," said Stewart instantly. "If you do, you'll smash us."

He leaned back against the palm tree and stared straight before him as Morgan and Pettigrew crossed the strip of shining white sand.

CHAPTER III

MORGAN was white, and his voice unsteady. The hatred he had for Stewart showed unmistakably. It was not the first time these two had met and thrashed out a question. They were duellists who had crossed swords before and had an inkling of each other's mettle. Pettigrew was nervous, chiefly because he feared Morgan might kill Stewart out of hand.

During the hurried nightmare of the voyage from Wakatea he had been perturbed by his friend's silence. He himself had cursed the wind, Stewart, himself and the *Anna* with monotonous impartiality. But Morgan had scarcely opened his mouth. For an hour at a time he would sit gazing at the planks under his feet, motionless, absorbed. The wind was fresh and they had kept every stitch of canvas full out, till the wind sang in the cordage and the sails bellied tight and hard as a drum. To Pettigrew's protests, Morgan had but one answer, "We've got to make Kikia in time."

Well, they had made it, thought Pettigrew, and wondered unhappily what the end would be. He watched uneasily as Morgan strode up to the two who were waiting so calmly.

"You didn't expect us," Morgan was saying grimly.

"Why should we?" returned Stewart.

"I guess Donovan didn't expect you when you met him last," said Morgan.

Stewart frowned.

"Couldn't say, I'm sure."

"Staying here long?" enquired Morgan.

"That's my business."

"Maybe it's mine, too. Where are you going when you leave here?"

"We're taking a cargo of hymn books to the Mormon missionary at Vaitia," said Stewart. "We have a crew of eleven boys and our cook's name is Mountain Breeze. Can I supply you with any other information?"

Morgan took a step forward.

"Cut it out, Stewart. I'm here on business. When did you see Donovan last?"

Stewart blew a smoke ring with elaborate indifference.

"Let me see," he said, "let me see now. Was it last month? Yes, I believe I saw him one day last month. Where was it now? Where could it have been?"

He could see the dull red tide of anger mounting in Morgan's face.

"Where's Donovan?" demanded Morgan.

"I haven't the slightest idea."

"That's a lie."

Stewart smoked on.

"The *Spindrift*—" began Morgan. Lamotte made an involuntary movement. "Some one made a bad job of scuttling the *Spindrift*," went on Morgan with narrowed eyes. "Some fool who bungled his business. Try doing it in the daylight next time, Lamotte."

Lamotte started up.

"I? You accuse me? And why? What do you know? How should I—"

Stewart's cool voice cut across his incoherent denials.

"Spit out the trouble, Morgan, and we'll try to help. Some one has scuttled Donovan's boat, eh? Well, I should say Donovan's the right one to make a song about that."

THERE was a pause. The sun was slipping down the sky and the trees threw long shadows across the beach. Somewhere a crazy gramophone shrieked out a tune that Broadway had forgotten a twelve-month past.

"Donovan's dead."

"Oh?" said Stewart with polite regret.

"Yes. We've—buried him."

"Indeed."

"Yes. He'd been murdered. Murdered, do you hear? Do you hear that, Lamotte?"

"The whole island will hear it if you bawl like that," commented Stewart. "Why are you wasting time in telling us? We're not going to shed any tears over Donovan."

"Why should you?" retorted Morgan, grown suddenly calm. His hand went to his belt and Pettigrew swallowed hard. "Go easy, you fool," he whispered hoarsely, but Morgan took no heed. He was holding something in his hand for Stewart to see.

"Ever seen that before?"

Stewart regarded it carefully. He felt Lamotte's body grow taut at his side.

"Earring, eh? Good workmanship there. Where did you get it?"

"We found it in Donovan's hand," Morgan told them. "He'd snatched it from some one—in the dark, I suppose. That's where we got it. You've seen it before."

"Never," declared Stewart. "And look here. If you think I'm going to help you in any fancy detective work, you've come to the wrong shop. You've been gabbling here too long already about your private concerns. I'm not interested. See?"

"You're afraid," said Morgan. "And Lamotte's afraid. Where's the other earring, Lamotte?"

But Lamotte's throat was so dry that the words would not come.

"Perhaps you think he's still wearing it?" suggested Stewart. "Let 'em have a look, Lamotte."

Slowly Lamotte turned his head. His left ear had been badly torn and the wound was not yet healed. Pettigrew pointed to it.

"Where'd you get that?" he asked.

"What?"

"Your ear's torn."

"He had a scrap the other night."

"Why don't you let him answer for himself?" burst out Morgan furiously. "He's got a tongue, hasn't he? Ah," with a flash of insight, "you're afraid he'll give the show away. You've been clever, but Lamotte—bah!"

HE SHOOK his fist at the big man.

"Listen! This earring—it is yours. You can lie and cheat and pretend, but I'll hack the truth out of you one day. You and Stewart—but for you Donovan would be alive to-day. He's buried—but do you think he'll sleep? He'll walk, I tell you. Don't go out in the dark, Lamotte. He may follow you. Don't listen to the wind in the rigging. You'll hear him calling. Footsteps padding behind you and a voice in your ear, Lamotte . . . and one night a wet hand at your throat."

Lamotte's face was white. He sat like one carven out of stone. It was obvious to all of them that he was terrified, and Stewart cursed him under his breath.

"He's afraid," said Pettigrew, and Stewart's eyes fastened on him with a look that made him wriggle uneasily.

"See here," said Stewart slowly, "seems to me you're just about crazy. From what I can make out, you've decided that Lamotte or I did Donovan in. Well, prove it."

"It doesn't need any proof," said Morgan. "You came into Wakatea the day before Donovan sailed. That fool Bill Hennessey told you where we were going. Nobody else knew. You wanted the chart. So you laid wait—"

"Right there you can stop your lies," interrupted Stewart fiercely. "If you've any charges to make, make 'em in court at Amanu, and produce your evidence. Don't come skulking round here making out that Lamotte and I are over handy with our shooting irons. If you do, you'll be sorry for it, I promise you."

He rose abruptly and sauntered off, followed by Lamotte.

PETTIGREW grew voluble with wrath and kicked up the sand with despairing heels.

"He's right, boy. We've no evidence. No one can prove that earring is Lamotte's. And what else have we got to go on except that? Nothing in the world. We can't prove a damn thing. Look at him now. Walkin' away as careless and easy as nine-pence. Hello! Who's the skirt? Lamotte's sister, I suppose. H'm. High stepper."

They watched as Val came out of Renfrew's and joined the two men. The sound of a laugh was borne on the clear air.

"Lamotte was good and scared," pursued Pettigrew. "If we could get him alone we'd soon choke it out of him. 'Twouldn't take long to make him spring a leak."

"Oh, let him go," said Morgan contemptuously. "He's a poor fool, anyway. It's

Stewart all the time. My God, how I'd like to get even with him!"

"We'll have to watch 'em hard. They'll sail right for Taukura when they leave here."

"The only chance is to get the chart off them before they can start, far as I can see," mused Pettigrew. "Trouble is, where is it? Somewhere on one of 'em, I'll bet. If we could get hold of Lamotte. . . ."

Their eyes turned seaward, to where the *Swallow* pulled at her anchor like a tethered bird. Her mast showed black against the deepening sky, and they could make out the figures of Stewart's Kanakas.

She had been built on the Clyde to the order of a Dutchman named Schuyler. He raced through his money and fled to the South Seas, leaving a host of fuming creditors in London, Amsterdam, and New York. Even here his passion for gambling pursued him.

One wild night Lamotte had plied the fool with whiskey, and Pereira made him boastful and elated by losing to him at poker. When the time was ripe, Pereira made a sign and Stewart took the cards in his steady hands, and began to deal. They played till dawn, and at sunrise Schuyler staggered to his feet and lurched away, his sodden body quivering with defeat. He had lost everything he possessed. Shocked sober, he tried to remember what had happened.

He had won and won and won again, till Stewart had declared that the devil was in the cards. Stewart had said he couldn't lose. Pereira had said so, and Lamotte as well. Somehow they were talking about the *Swallow*, and in sheer bravado he had staked her. His own idea, of course. He tried to recall who had first mentioned the boat. He had a vague idea that it was Stewart. . . . He thought of drowning himself, but he was afraid of sharks.

"WONDER where Schuyler is now," said Pettigrew. "Last time I saw him was at Port Edward, hangin' round the beach. He don't shave very often, and his clothes is mostly missin'. He was cadgin' whiskey off me, and I slipped him a couple of drinks. Soft, I suppose, but he looked kind of queer and I felt mean to be lappin' it up and him sittin' there like a dog that knows it's goin' to be cuffed or kicked out of the door."

The sun had gone, and the lagoon deepened from purple to black. A trader named McGinty came out, and, with many grunts, hung a lantern over his door. He was expecting a cargo before dawn. The sound of singing came from a group clustered round a fire half way down the beach. The dancing flames fell on the rich curves of brown bodies that lay stretched at ease, prodigal of their evanescent beauty.

One of the girls had made herself a crown of scarlet hibiscus flowers that cast fantastic shadows in the flickering light. Pettigrew looked and turned away and looked again. He was growing old, and soon for him would come the end of fighting. He knew Morgan was determined to join battle with Stewart, and he knew that this bitter enmity meant that one of the two must go under. He had a sudden shamed longing for the peace and laughter that might be his if he chose. Low caressing voices called to him, and he made a tentative movement.

Then he remembered Donovan, lying cold and still, and the desire passed as swiftly as it had come.

"Listen," said Morgan. "Seems to me I heard something."

The next moment a knife whizzed through the darkness and struck the palm tree four inches from Morgan's head.

STEWART'S anger showed in the glint of his eye and a certain curtness in his speech. He could not subdue it even when Valerie joined them and sauntered between them in the direction of Mrs. Renfrew's. Inwardly he was cursing Lamotte with slow, furious oaths. It had been a near thing, a very near thing indeed. Lamotte was a superstitious fool, and had almost given the show away when Morgan spoke about Donovan's possible return. If they got hold of him alone they would work on his feelings to such an extent that he'd blurt out the whole story. Morgan would probably try for that, decided Stewart, and resolved to keep Lamotte under his hand till they were aboard.

Before they reached the bungalow, where Mrs. Renfrew was awaiting them in hospitable impatience, he saw Pereira emerge from a place familiarly known as "Jake's." Pereira strolled across their path in an apparently casual manner. A look passed between them, and Pereira nodded. As soon as he could, Stewart made an excuse to Mrs. Renfrew, warned Lamotte that they must go aboard shortly, and went out again. He knew where to find Pereira, and made straight for a small door at the rear of Jake's. He opened it and went in, to see Pereira absorbed in a game of patience. The room was full of smoke and Stewart coughed.

"New *patienza,*" volunteered Pereira. "You see, you spread all da card so. You push out one—so—and you move firs' one, now one more—so."

He bent over the cards again, and Stewart sat down resignedly on the floor. Pereira could not drop a thing till he had finished it. This trait it was that made him an admirable ally and a deadly and painstaking enemy. Stewart considered him as he sat there. Pereira was a mongrel, Spanish blood predominating. He was lean and dried up by the suns of many years in the tropics. He had a small, agile body with arms so long that they gave him a curiously deformed appearance. His gait was a swinging shamble reminiscent of an ape. From his dark wizened face his eyes peered out, bright and inquisitive as a squirrel's. At last the game was played out and he turned to Stewart.

"Well?"

"Morgan," said Stewart.

Pereira regarded him speculatively.

"You want him—made quiet?"

"No. Frightened."

Pereira nodded.

"Uh—huh. That all?"

"Can you keep him here for say—one—two days? Longer, if possible."

"Why not?" said Pereira.

Stewart frowned.

"He'll kick. He's a devil to fight. I want to get a start of—well, two days, if possible. After that—"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"After that I will deal with him myself."

"And payment will be—"

"As usual," said Stewart curtly. "You'll have to look slippy. They may take it into their heads to be off any minute."

Pereira grunted. When Stewart had gone, he took out his knife and felt it carefully. A long time he sat with closed eyes, planning a capture. Soon he rose and went to his own hut, where he made certain preparations.

MORGAN lifted his hand and wrenched the knife out of the tree. By the light of the rising moon he and Pettigrew stared at it.

"Some one's tender way of sayin' 'Get out!' " suggested the latter. "Do you reckon it's Stewart?"

"Listen," said Morgan.

There was a faint rustle to the left among the undergrowth, a sound of bushes parted by stealthy hands, a sense of peering eyes. Morgan drew back for a spring, and leapt forward, with Pettigrew at his heels shuffling excitedly.

They crashed into a mass of fragrant *tuitui* and became aware of some one running before them, nimbly, lightly, very fast. They redoubled their efforts and Morgan forged ahead. From the beach below, the sound of singing came more faintly. On they went, still pursuing the fugitive in front, till just as they were between two tall palms Stewart tripped over a rope held taut a foot above the ground. The next moment Pettigrew sprawled beside him. Morgan, in the grip of two long arms, was struggling furiously.

He half rose, and some one sat heavily on his shoulders and bore him to the earth again. He was conscious of a stabbing pain in his left shoulder. He hit out violently and his clenched hand came in contact with fingers that gripped and held it in a vise. His arm was wrenched above his head, and he felt the stab of a needle in his flesh. His struggles lessened, his eyes felt as if leaden weights were on them. He could hear Pettigrew swearing by his side and he tried to reach him, but the effort was too great. He felt his senses slipping away from him. Great shapes whirled before his eyes and then sank into nothingness. He lay like a log, face downward.

Pereira prodded him cautiously. There was no movement and he nodded, satisfied. It had been harder than he anticipated. He braced himself and lifted the inert body to a sitting position. He passed Morgan's languid arms round his own body, tied the wrists securely, and turned in the direction of his hut.

"Kila," he said over his shoulder.

"Here," came a voice from the darkness.

"You lift fat man?"

"Damn heavy," grumbled Kila. "Kila one big man big all same Moriani. Kila lift him."

THE little procession started. Pereira led the way, Morgan's arms dragging at his waist. After him trailed Kila, with Pettigrew slung across his shoulders. Cautiously they made their way across the moonlit space in front of Pereira's hut. No one saw them as they went in. Pereira closed the door and lit a small lamp before he cut the cord around Morgan's wrists. He sighed with relief as the heavy body fell to the ground. He noticed blood, and saw that Morgan's shoulder was hurt. It was a flesh wound and he bound it up skilfully before he tugged the big man to a corner of the room and propped him in a sitting position against the sloping wall. Kila, squatting on his haunches and examining a damaged thumb, reached out and took Morgan's limp hand. He regarded it critically, comparing it with his own. His fingers strayed over the powerful arm-muscles, and he frowned. He looked up at Pereira.

"You tie legs belong Moriani? Suppose Moriani wake up he fight all same devil."

"Moriani not wake," Pereira assured him. "By and by make more sleep-magic. Moriani sleep one two days."

"Pereira devil-doctor," said Kila reverently.

Pereira chuckled. He took out the hypodermic syringe and wiped it carefully. His face, where innumerable lines were carved deep in the olive skin, resembled some old Florentine gargoyle. Kila considered him a god, and gazed with awe at the great hairy arms and cruel hands. He had seen them at work more than once.

Presently Pereira went out and closed the door. He walked slowly through the moonlit night toward the beach. The trees stood like tall ghosts on either hand, and the white sand gleamed strangely. The black sea with its incessant moan seemed a live thing. The moon cut a silver path across it, and Pereira could see where the *Swallow* rocked beyond the reef. Even as he watched, he heard a faint grating sound as the anchor was drawn up. Her sails were set to catch the breeze, and she leapt forward into the night. He admired her graceful lines and marked how well she cut through the water. He wondered why Stewart wanted a start of two days. Obviously he was afraid of being followed. Pereira chuckled at the thought of Morgan, heavily asleep in the obscurity of the hut. He was aware that Stewart considered this man a dangerous enemy, and involuntarily his respect for Morgan increased.

He found his knife buried in the palm tree and pulled it out. He put it in his belt and made his way to Jake's. The sound of rough laughter floated out on the scented air. Some one was singing a Bowery catch with a lusty chorus and there was much shouting, broken by an occasional cough. A man went in and instantly there was a cry of welcome. It was Horton of the *Naiad*, an island trader. He was a burly fellow with a red beard, well known in Kikia. Pereira slid in after him, and sat in a corner, watching, listening to the half-drunken talk. It was well after midnight when he came out and shambled home.

The lamp still burned and Kila lay asleep across the doorway. Pereira stepped over him, light-footed as a cat.

CHAPTER IV

LAMOTTE leaned against the deck-house and stared at the dead-water in the wake of the ship. They were four days out from Kikia. Since leaving the island they had run before a spanking breeze. North of Vaneta they were caught in the tail of a storm, but the *Swallow* scudded through it like a frightened hare and suffered little damage. Now as far as the eye could reach there was nothing but the sea. The intense blue, broken by the manes of the white horses, attracted Valerie. She watched it till her eyes ached, and she retired to the welcome shade. Here she sat, knees drawn up to her chin, and laughed when the flying spray caught her unawares. She had insisted on discarding her skirts after a disastrous encounter with the wind on the first day out. Accordingly she had produced a pair of riding breeches which she wore with superb disdain of Lamotte's disapproval. She resembled, more than ever, a handsome boy, and her brother's eyes narrowed when he saw Stewart's veiled glance of admiration.

It was Stewart who came and stood over her as she sat gazing across the water.

"Enjoying it?"

"Rather. I've never seen anything so blue as this sky in my life."

" 'This inverted bowl we call the sky,' " he quoted.

She looked up quickly.

"You like Omar?"

"He's very bitter, but he manages to hit the nail on the head now and then."

"Yes. That's what I feel. I don't think he's as great as people make out. I knew some people in New York who had a little circle called the 'Khayyam Klub,'—spelt with a K,—and they used to have solemn meetings. They'd read a line or so and then argue about it for hours. They used to burn pastils that made the room hot and smelly. Tea was served Persian fashion—well, they said it was Persian fashion. It tasted like hot treacle."

"You had a great many friends in New York?"

"Yes."

"You regret them?"

"Some of them."

"Tell me about them."

"There's not much to say. They were all very kind to me."

He thought: "She's cold. I might have known it by her eyes. Untouched . . . yes."

Aloud he said, "You are enjoying the trip so far?"

"Very much."

SHE leaned back, her hands behind her head. As his eyes swept the proud curve of her throat, something caught at his heart. He had an insane longing to take her in his arms and crush her till she cried out. Her very coldness urged him on. He had a passionate desire to make her feel, to awaken her out of her virgin indifference, to make her suffer, if need be, so long as she awoke. For four days he had carried on an astute campaign, at first in idleness, but soon with growing interest. The difficulty of the chase added to its zest. He had loved many women, and never loved in vain. They might resist fiercely, but in the end he conquered them—always. Some quality in him, some strange magic in his eyes, or his voice or his caressing hands, brought them to him at last, tamed, submissive, a little afraid. Defiance he knew; dislike he could cope with; but the frank friendliness which Val accorded him puzzled him mightily. He admitted to himself that her indifference made the battle hard. Yet it never occurred to him to doubt his ultimate victory. Skilled in women, he realized that infinite patience was the weapon for this duel. He knew that she liked him, that he amused and interested her, but beyond that there was nothing.

"When shall we reach Taukura?" she asked, and Stewart came out of his dream.

"In about two days, if we're lucky."

"We've had good luck up till now."

"Yes," Stewart agreed grimly.

"Suppose someone gets there first?"

"They won't," he assured her.

"I suppose other people know there are pearls there?"

"Very few. It's a difficult place to find."

"You've been there before?"

"No."

"Then how—"

"We've got a chart."

"Oh, of course. Paul told me."

On hearing his name, Lamotte came over and squatted down beside them. His face was set in a scowl.

"You do look pleased with yourself," Val commented. "Paul, where did you and Mr. Stewart get the chart?"

Lamotte started.

"You are too curious. I knew how it would be. Women! Always wanting to know! What does it matter to you where we got it? You think we stole it, *hein?*"

His savage manner angered her.

"I don't care where you got your rotten chart," she retorted, and left them abruptly.

Stewart was furious.

"She scared me," was Lamotte's defence. "She scared me. Somehow, I think our luck will not last. A woman on board! It always changes the luck. I did not wish to bring her. But you and she between you—you and she—"

He broke off, frowning, then turned on Stewart with blazing eyes.

"I am watching you. You follow her. You look at her. You talk to her. I will not have it. She is my sister, and one day I will marry her to a good man. You—you must keep off."

"Indeed?" said Stewart suavely. "The virtuous Lamotte defies the villain of the piece, eh? By the way, does your sister know exactly why you left France all those years ago? I gather she imagines that it was necessary for your health. Up to a point, of course, she is right. Up to a point. Yes. . . ."

He was amused and a little astonished at Lamotte's regard for Valerie. It had never occurred to him that Lamotte cared for a living soul.

"You will not tell her?" said Lamotte anxiously.

"I shall if you won't stop your confounded butting in," said Stewart savagely. "Anyone would think I want to abduct her because I'm merely civil to her. Cut it right out, Lamotte, or you and I shall quarrel."

WHEN he spoke in that tone, Lamotte said no more. Without a word he went aft and shouted a query to the lookout. Stewart went below and spread the chart, Donovan's chart, on the table that was built around the stem of the main-mast. When Lamotte came down he was still poring over it.

"Aren't we due to sight the Dangerous Isles?"

"Just about."

"After that, south-east?"

"South-east."

"It's a nasty bit by the Dangerous Isles. Horton lost a ship there two years ago. Cross-reefs, that's the trouble."

"Passage is marked here plainly enough."

They bent over the chart.

Lamotte stood watching him like a dog that is not quite sure of his master's next move. He followed Stewart up the companion and heard him caution Kaoha to keep her head due south. Soon they would be near the dreaded group named by the old navigators the Dangerous Isles, where cross-reefs made sailing a matter of life and death. The group extended over a large area and a detour would mean the loss of a day. The passage was marked on Donovan's chart and Stewart had decided to take the *Swallow* through. Lamotte was hesitant. Yet Stewart's look when he mentioned the alternative route was enough to shut his lips. He paced the deck uneasily, tiger-fashion, till Val called to know what was the matter. He went and stood beside her after a glance at Stewart, intent on the helm.

"You're like a polar bear," Val told him. "Got something on your mind?"

He frowned.

"It's madness to try this passage through the Isles," he told her in a carefully lowered voice. "But Stewart—bah, he cares about nothing in this world, his own skin least of all. One of these days he will come to a bad end. I know it."

"I don't understand," said Val, sitting up. "What's he going to do?"

Lamotte explained bitterly.

"To gain a day he will sail through an intricate channel that winds in and out of the islands. They are called the Dangerous Isles. *Mon Dieu*, a good name for them! They are a graveyard. Horton lost a ship here. Masters was killed here. Old man Barton was wrecked here, and he and his crew drowned."

"But there is a way through?"

"There is. Many have tried it. A few have come through."

"Well, why shouldn't we?"

He made an impatient gesture.

"You are a child, Valerie. You do not understand the ways of the sea."

"I understand that Mr. Stewart is a clever man," she told him. "What's the matter with you, Paul? It'll be all right. He's not the sort to fail."

"I am not afraid," he returned sulkily.

VAL went and stood by Stewart. He smiled at her as he shouted an order to Kaoha.

"Paul says it's dangerous."

"You are afraid?"

"Certainly not," said Valerie. "I'm afraid of nothing. What happens if we hit a rock?"

He laughed.

"Death—in the way death should happen. Very swift, with no time for regrets."

"Regrets?"

"Yes—for the end of beauty."

"But is it necessary? Must you go through?"

"It will save a day."

He hesitated.

"You see, someone else wants the Taukura pearls."

"A rival?"

"Put it that way if you like. Anyway, it's a man who's no friend of mine."

"Who is he?"

"His name's Morgan."

"And where is he?"

Stewart suppressed a grin.

She clapped her hands.

"It's exciting."

"Have you any idea," Stewart asked her, "of just how deadly trade rivalries can be? There's nothing else to quarrel about in these parts—except women. And even they take second place where pearls are concerned. This isn't a pleasure cruise, you know. If we should happen to meet the *Anna* there may be a scrap."

"A scrap?"

"Yes. I think that when Morgan and I meet again we shall settle things up—permanently."

She raised startled eyes.

"You mean there may be a fight? You and Paul and this Morgan who wants the pearls?"

"That's it. But you needn't be afraid. Nothing will happen to you."

"I can shoot," she told him proudly. "Do you think I'd lie low when there was fighting going on?"

They both laughed. Lamotte heard them, and his eyes clouded with thought.

ON THE fifth day out from Kikia the *Swallow* entered the passage that leads through the Dangerous Isles. It was as if some giant, suddenly tired of his marbles, had thrown them pell-mell into the amethystine sea. The archipelago consisted of nearly four hundred atolls, many of them uncharted. Very few were inhabited and most of them barely rose above the water. They were avoided by mariners on account of swift currents caused by cross-reefs peculiar to this group. There was a stiff breeze and Stewart knew he had a nasty job before him. He took an extra peg to steady his nerves and became oblivious to everything except the task of coaxing the schooner unharmed through the deep-water passage. His face was set, and the nature of the man showed in the determined jaw and the hard lines of the thin lips. Val watched, fascinated by the dogged air of purpose which marked his whole bearing.

His hands gripped the wheel as surely and confidently as though he had negotiated the passage a dozen times before. And yet, behind her admiration lurked something—some inexplicable feeling of distrust that made her vaguely uneasy. What was it in the turn of his head or the curt sound of his voice that repelled her? She gave it up at last, and fell to watching the dim islands sliding past on either hand. The Kanakas waved their hands mysteriously and talked in subdued murmurs. They believed the group to be haunted. Their legend had it that the islands were the abode of unhappy spirits who planted the cross-reef in order to terrify ships and so preserve their solitude unbroken.

A sinister fin showed where a shark followed in the wake of the schooner. Val shuddered at its relentless pursuit, its grim persistence. To her it typified the horror of something unknown, the subtle menace that underlies the strange exotic beauty of these parts. It was as if Nature, boastful of her charms, had no scruples in appearing naked, flaunting her cruelty, her savage, unutterable cruelty, proud of her power to maim, to kill, to destroy.

THERE was a slight commotion among the Kanakas, shouts of advice and caution, and derisive noises directed toward the shark. They had a great meat-hook on which they were fixing a lump of pork. A line whizzed through the air, and the pork splashed into the sea, where it was instantly devoured.

Then began a struggle. In vain the great fish leapt and floundered. The iron tore its flesh, and the merciless rope mocked at its furious efforts to escape. The boys, a yelling group now, their fears forgotten, taunted the monster with its helplessness, and watched its fury with callous interest. Lamotte cast a careless eye in their direction and smiled faintly. Stewart never turned his head. At last Val could bear it no longer.

"Paul, make them stop."

"Serve the beggar right," said Lamotte in an easy tone. "Let 'em alone, Val. He's cold blooded, anyway. Can't feel, you know."

"It's rotten," she said.

The water was flecked with blood, yet the frantic plunging of the tortured fish did not abate.

"Wonderful tenacity of life," commented Stewart in a casual tone. "He'll hang on like that for the best part of an hour."

He turned to the wheel again. She walked away and he watched the swaying figure, and sighed. Then he bent his mind to the task in hand. Night was coming on, and they had a third of the passage before them. For another hour he held on, and Lamotte, beside him, shouted anxious directions. When darkness came, there was nothing to be done but wait. It was a futile business to attempt anchorage among the crumbling reefs. Stewart decided to heave to and hope for the best.

The cook, a Tahitian, served up dinner, and the three of them sat down to partake of it. It was a silent meal, and when it was over Val went on deck again, in no mood for talk. It was with a feeling of irritation that she realized Stewart had followed her, and was standing motionless beside her.

"Looking at the Coal Sack?" he asked at length. "We're pretty prosaic, we Europeans. The natives say that the gods reached up and pulled the world down from there. Looks queer, doesn't it, to see that empty space among the stars?"

She murmured some reply. All around them was still, save for the ceaseless lapping of the water against the side of the ship. The naked masts loomed dim and unreal till they seemed to touch the stars. Here, in the midst of peril, with a hazardous task ahead, the loneliness was intensified by the thought that the *Swallow* might be eaten up by the sea and no trace of her be found. There was no one to heed, no one to come, shouting, to the rescue, whatever befell. No one to heed. . . . The phrase hammered itself out in Stewart's brain. No one to heed.

VAL moved, and impulsively he put out his arms. The magic of the starlit night had him in thrall. A wave of desire swept over him, submerging everything except the stark need for Val's body held close against his own. His hands closed over her wrists, and slid to her shoulders. He felt the start that she gave, and a smile curved his thin lips. How often had it been thus—the start, the struggle, the inevitable surrender? Yet somehow this girl was different from the many women he had conquered. He could feel the driven blood racing madly under his hot hands. He bent his head and his lips found hers in the darkness. His pulse beat high and there was an odd singing in his ears. He kissed her swiftly, drew back, saw her face a white blur in the darkness, and bent forward again. This time he found her lips drawn into a thin hard line of resistance. His hands slipped to her waist and he drew her to him and wondered why his heart beat so furiously. His arms locked hers and she was powerless. He had a sudden thought: "I'm a darned fool, rushing it like this."

She was struggling, with the panic-stricken desperation of a trapped animal. He could hear her deep sobbing breaths. She reminded him of Dolores, a little Spaniard in Port Edward who nearly knifed him the first time he kissed her. The first time . . . yes, but not the second. Would she call out to Lamotte? he wondered, and frowned at thought of the quarrel that must inevitably ensue. Lamotte, roused, might be dangerous.

With a swift movement he released her and turned away. She fell back, gasping, against a coil of rope, and lay there trembling with rage. How had he dared? For the first time in her life someone had held her against her will and the experience awakened a riot of new sensations. Amidst the tumult of anger came the thought, unbidden, coldly impersonal, "So that's what it's like. . . ." Her mind shied away, back to the stolen kisses and clumsy hugs that had formed the chief thrill of college parties; to the timid embraces of flushed youths at dances; to the sly looks and furtive attempts at tenderness that marked countless mild flirtations. Remembering these, she was amazed at their ineptitude, their unutterable futility. She raised her eyes and saw Stewart standing motionless, a still, white ghost in the moonlit night. His head was bent and his utter immobility had in it something of distress, of mute appeal, that touched her in spite of herself.

He did not look up as she passed him, but when she had disappeared down the companion his figure relaxed from its skilful pose, and he stretched himself meditatively. Perhaps he hadn't been a fool after all. At any rate, he told himself, he had shocked her into life at last. For a long time he stood there, living again those moments when he held her in his arms.

CHAPTER V

WHEN Val awoke after a troubled sleep, the *Swallow* was already under way. She heard her brother's voice raised in command and then the creaking of the sails as more canvas was let out. The noises of shipboard, grown so familiar in these few days since they left Kikia, aroused in her a sense of security, of friendliness with the common things of daily life. She had a sudden inexplicable reluctance in remembering the events of the night before. In something very much like panic, she pushed away the thought of Stewart. Yet she could not drive out the picture of his silent figure that neither moved nor spoke when she went by. What had held him? Shame? Pride? Remorse? She dressed slowly and went on deck with the question still unanswered.

She went up to Lamotte.

"Where are we now?"

"Nearly through this cursed passage. Just after dawn we had a narrow shave. I tell you, we were nearly gone. A hidden reef—not marked on the chart. Yes, it was a near thing. But Stewart—bah! He bears a charmed life, I think. Certainly he will never be drowned. We sheered off in the nick of time. And he laughed. Yes. He laughed."

He began to walk up and down indignantly.

"Always the same," he went on. "One day there will come a time too many. Why do you look at me like that? I know that I could crush him in my arms. Well, one day—I will. Let him look out. That's all."

Valerie was amused.

"Surely you are not afraid of him?"

"Afraid?" said Lamotte, superbly. "I? Afraid of that *cochon?* Huh!"

She laughed.

"Of course not. Paul, don't be angry. It's much too beautiful here. Oh, there's a bird! Look!"

"It's a frigate bird," he told her. "They'll follow the ship for miles. Some say they're the spirits of drowned sailors."

He left her, and Val, her eyes on the bird, did not see the glance that he cast at her in passing. She wondered what Stewart would say. More than that, she considered what her attitude to him would be. She knew that she ought to feel outraged, insulted, indignant beyond words at his temerity. Yet, with incurable honesty, she admitted that she felt none of these things. Instead, she was conscious of a curious excitement mingled with fear. It puzzled her. It revealed an aspect of herself of which she had never dreamed. Behind the startled anger of the night before, there had risen, for one blinding moment, some instinct that answered Stewart's passion. Some lawless strain in her had responded to the fire that was in him. The emotion had passed in an instant. But it had been.

THE aromatic odor of coffee met her nostrils and the Tahiti boy, a pleasant youth named Makui, poked his head round the corner of the deck-house.

"Taofe belong missie ready," he remarked. "Suppose missie not come, Taofe he cold, very bad."

He waited anxiously to assist her down the companion. As she followed him, it chanced that Stewart crossed the deck. He greeted her gravely and passed on. To her annoyance, she felt the quick blood start to her cheeks. She replied coldly and followed Makui with a heart that beat fast.

Over her coffee she recovered her composure, and when Lamotte came down she chatted amiably to him, persuading herself that the proper course was to ignore Stewart completely as far as politeness would allow. Lamotte, pleased to find her in good spirits, kept up an eager conversation, and more than once she assured herself that the events of last night had no further power to move her. Yet at the sound of a footstep she caught her breath so sharply that Lamotte looked up. She laughed and made some trivial remark. He was telling her of the last voyage they had made in those parts.

"We did not come through the group then. No, we went round. At the extreme south lies Paviete, a strange island very different from the atolls. It is of volcanic formation, and there are hills and steaming valleys. . . . Oh, yes, it is a good size, and it has an excellent harbor. An old Chink lives there who is an extraordinary man. He collects from the natives huge quantities of *bêche-de-mer* and each month a ship calls there to take it away. Yes, it gets to China eventually. He makes a huge fortune. How? This way. He has a magic lantern. The price of admission is a specified quantity of *bêche-de-mer*. . . . Do you see? The old rascal gets his goods for nothing. He gives a show twice a week. The shed is crowded every time. He must be very nearly a millionaire. His name is Chang. . . . It should be Silas Q. Chang."

"What's he going to do with it all?"

"Nobody knows. He likes Stewart. They've had several deals. Pearls, mostly. Chang's mad on pearls—nearly as mad as Stewart."

"I suppose he speaks a sort of English?"

"He speaks the most excellent English. It is like listening to a book. I wish we were going near Paviete. You would have been interested. But it lies right out of our present course."

He shouted for Makui and more coffee.

"MR. STEWART is keen on pearls, then?" said Val, when Makui had gone again.

"Keen? I should say so. It is a sort of mania with him. He is never satisfied, no. Always he is seeking for the supreme pearl. He will never find it, of course. But—there you are. It is an obsession."

"He's been to Taukura before for pearls?"

"Never."

"What made him decide to try this time?" she asked curiously.

"How should I know?" retorted Lamotte.

"Where did he get the chart?"

"How should I know?" said Lamotte again.

She laughed.

"All right. Don't bite my head off. Perhaps he killed someone for it, eh?"

"My God, that you should say that!" he breathed.

She shrank back, startled at his sudden pallor. He had risen, his coffee cup in his hand, and stood staring at her with narrowed eyes.

"What is it, Paul? How white you are! What is it?"

"It is nothing—the heat," he said heavily. He put down the cup and went up on deck. It seemed to her that he swayed as he walked.

She sat still, considering. What mystery was there about this enterprise? Why did the two men turn the conversation every time she tried to get them to talk about it? Paul, this big brother whom she had not seen for so many years—what was there about him that made her feel disappointed? It was nothing tangible, nothing she could put her finger on, and say— "There—that's what I don't like." Somehow it was his attitude toward Stewart that disquieted her. Obvious that he admired Stewart. Obvious, too, that he feared him—hated him, at times, for reasons which she could not fathom. Did he resent the other man's leadership? she wondered. If so, why had he ventured on this cruise with him? . . . Pearls. . . . Stewart was mad about pearls, he had said. So impatient was Stewart that he had risked all their lives to get to Taukura quickly. Why was he in such a hurry? Was it possible that some one else was racing toward the island?

Impossible, if there was only one chart in existence.

At thought of Stewart, her mind shied away, reluctant to face the situation. Had her first impression of vague distrust been justified? Or was she judging too hardly an outburst of sincere feeling? Restlessly she moved to the open porthole and looked out across the tumbling sea. The intense blue gave her a feeling of pleasure that was almost sensuous in its appeal. All her life she had loved color, rich masses of color—blue of sea and sky, fields of golden corn, the innumerable tints of woods in autumn.

Tom Hyson, of the Khyyam Klub in New York, had been grieved, shocked almost, at her predilections. She remembered the incident quite well. He had been choosing new curtains for his small exotic flat. He came to her in his perplexity, hovering between a pale gray and an aesthetic and washy blue. Patiently she had waited while he spread out the finicking bits of cloth—hand-woven, of course—grays and dull greens and extraordinary shades of mauve. How his fishlike face had dropped when she laughed at him! She smiled at the remembrance, and wondered where he was now. Still pottering about in his rotten little rooms, she supposed, still writing stupid, indecent poems, and reading them aloud to that decadent crowd who made up the Klub. Well, she was well out of it all, she decided. The thought crossed her mind: How Stewart would have laughed at them!

ON DECK, Stewart was arguing with Lamotte. The latter was at the wheel, his face set and angry. His powerful arms gave Stewart an impression of enormous strength. He caught himself wondering just what would happen if Lamotte got out of control.

"I tell you she suspects something. She asked me again where we got the chart. She laughed. She said, 'I suppose Stewart killed someone to get it.' Yes, she said that. It startled me."

"And of course you showed it," commented Stewart drily. "I suppose you turned pale and gasped fishily, just by way of showing her that she was near the mark."

The schooner heeled to the breeze, and a spate of foam thudded across the deck. Stewart shook the salt drops from his hair and laughed.

"One day she will find out," he declared. "Through you, probably, or through her own instinct. Till then, don't let's worry."

"And when she does, what then?"

"Never decide beforehand what course to take with a woman," Stewart told him gravely. "Sufficient unto the day are the moods thereof."

There was a silence.

"We're pretty well clear of the group now," said Lamotte at last. "By the way, are you going to touch Paviete?"

"Not till we come back. If we get anything worth while, I might do a deal with Chang."

"I hate that yellow beast. Have you ever noticed his lips? Like a wolf's mouth. When he talks he draws them back over his teeth. And his fat body and his little eyes—bah, I hate him."

"You're afraid of him."

"I? Afraid?"

"Yes. You're scared of a heap of things, Lamotte. Some of it's superstition, I think. I suppose you can't help it. I've only got to mention Donovan's name—yes, I thought so. Your face has changed. Anyone would think you were haunted."

"Haunted," echoed Lamotte in a choking whisper. "I—I dream about him. Night after night I see him. Yes, I see his furious eyes and the gun in his hand. Then his body crumples up—you remember how he slid to the floor?—and I am alone again. And then—footsteps. What did Morgan say? 'Footsteps in the dark.' Yes, I listen for them always. Pad, pad, pad."

"Shut up," said Stewart abruptly. "You're like a nervous woman with your talk of bogies. It's indigestion. You eat too much. If you don't cut out this blasted nonsense—"

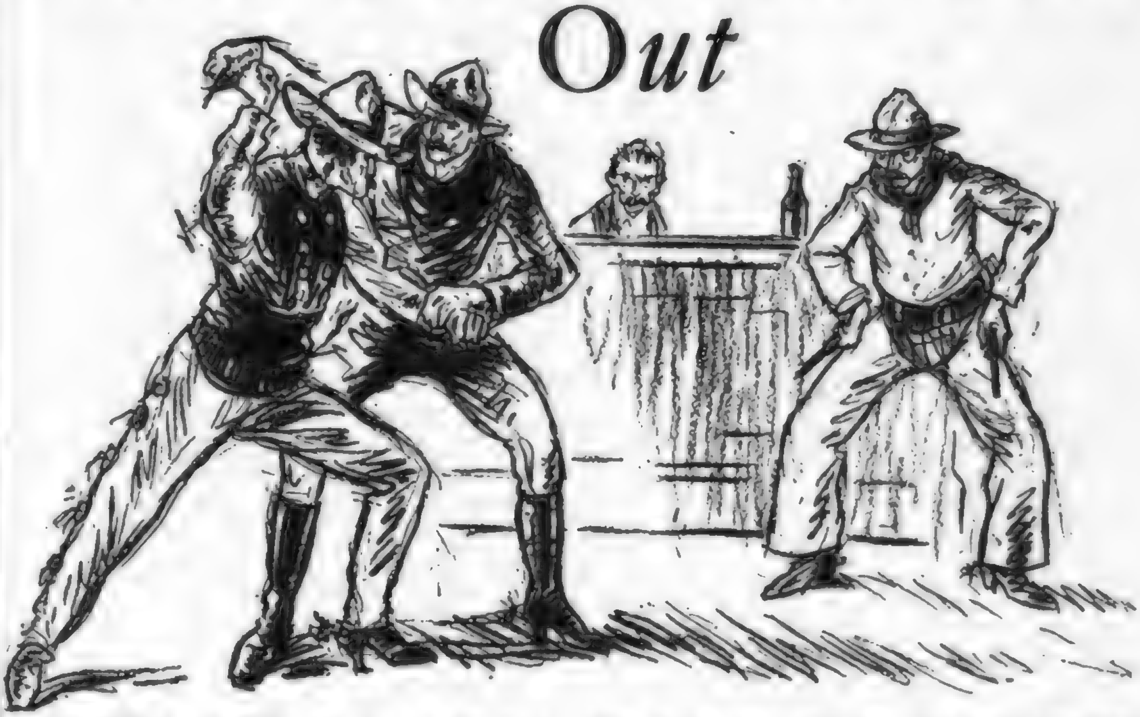
He broke off and walked away.

Lamotte watched him, with eyes in which the fires of hate smouldered sullenly.

In the following chapters Morgan and Pettigrew give chase to Stewart. In the black of night their longboat creeps stealthily upon the "swallow."

WILLIAM CORCORAN'S *New Story of the Old West*

W*hen* THIEVES F*all* O*ut*



AS THEY topped the little rise and the town of Alguna came into view, the pair drew their horses to a halt and silently surveyed the sprawling community of dingy frame houses. It was hot, quietly and breathlessly hot; the brush about them was still and gray with dust; and in the town not a sign of industry was visible in token of the life sheltered in the seared and drab dwellings.

Monte Manero, swarthy, elegant in silken sash and many conchas, ironical of mouth and sharp of eye, drew the makings from his shirt pocket and manufactured a smoke with deft movements. He glanced to the rider beside him. "To arrive at this place we ride in such heat!" he chuckled. "I think you and me we are crazy."

Sacaton Bill smiled lazily. He was a tall sinewy man, the sort whose movements seem awkward and impeded by his very size, yet one who could move on occasion with remarkable speed and dispatch. "Well, Monte, maybe they keeps somethin' cool and worth ridin' for in that place half way along the street there. Sho'ly more invitin' than sittin' under a mesquite with all the little horn toads back yonder." He turned to the Mexican, smiling quizzically. His lean, wide mouthed face, his good humored blue eyes, were lighted with a certain bland expectation.

"So?" returned Monte. "Something cool, maybe?" The cigaret drooped from one corner of his mouth as he flipped his gun from the holster on his hip. It would seem that he touched it and it leaped before him, to be clutched instantly in fingers that almost caressed it. His thumb released the cylinder, a twist of the wrist opened it. Five virgin cartridges gleamed in the bright sun; the sixth chamber was properly empty. Monte gravely nodded his head in satisfaction, and closed and holstered the weapon in one motion.

"I am ready," he announced.

Sacaton Bill chuckled to himself as they rode down the gentle slope into town.

THEY dismounted before the Silver Stallion Saloon and tied the bridle reins to the hitch rail with care. Not too much care; those innocent looking knots would come apart at a single jerk from a knowing hand. Then they went inside, Sacaton first, casually, and Monte after, his glance sweeping the street as he disappeared within the swinging doors.

The darkened interior of the saloon was cool after the sun. It was a place of peace and rest—an impression fostered by the trio who snored gently on tilted chairs against one wall, and by the barkeep himself, who popped up, bleary eyed with sleep, from his resting place behind the shelter of the bar.

"We craves coolness, tall and damp," Sacaton confided as he leaned a grateful elbow on the bar. Monte joined him, his eyes studying every feature of the low-ceilinged square room.

The barkeep attained a sufficient, if slightly embarrassed, professional air, and drew two foamy glasses of beer from the brass taps. "That's the coolest thing in a hundred miles, gents," he announced as he slid the glasses before them. "Comes from below—only cellar in town."

"Well now," observed Sacaton, "that's plumb interestin'. Last time I rode through here there wasn't nothin' else but cellars in the whole town. Changed, ain't it?"

The barkeep, his faded and slightly protuberant eyes opening wider than before, gazed at Sacaton in a certain mystification. He cocked his head slightly. "Cellars? Nothin' else but?"

"That's what I said," Sacaton assured him earnestly.

"But—how come? Who lived in 'em?" the incredulous boniface demanded.

"Gophers!"

Seemingly Sacaton Bill ignored the slack jaw and subsequent mounting flush on the barkeep's face. He rolled himself a cigaret with sober concentration. But then he was distracted by the behavior of Monte Manero alongside. By all appearances the Mexican was working out an exacting problem. First canting his head to one side he regarded some point across the room where the three slept on the tilted chairs; then he moved a pace and estimated and gauged the problem from his new point of vantage.

Both Sacaton and the bartender stared at Monte, and then followed his gaze to the side wall. All they could see there was the usual furniture of a cowtown saloon, tables and chairs, three of the latter occupied by an unprepossessing assortment of customers. The trio wore inconspicuous riding clothes, well worn; and they carried gun belts which undeniably had seen hard service. Their faces were of the same cast, angular, lantern jawed and lean lipped; and the resemblance was heightened by beards in the incipient stage known as bristles. Even in sleep they looked as they no doubt strove hard to look—tough hombres all.

"WHAT you figgerin', Monte?" inquired Sacaton with mild interest. The barkeep, leaning over the bar, stared rather vacantly at the pair.

"Me?" queried Monte. "This would be one damn' good thing if I get him figured right. Look—three chairs leaning so. Three hombres asleep. Think now—three shots to upset the chairs without breaking the legs."

"The legs of the chairs you mean?" pursued Sacaton with mounting interest.

"Yes."

"Say—that's a good one," exclaimed Sacaton. "Let's try it. If we break one of those fellas' legs we get another shot."

"Sure!" beamed the Mexican.

"Hey!" came a hoarse cry from behind the bar. "Fer cripes' sake, lay off! You'll get killed proper if you wake up them fellers. That's—"

"I get first try, Monte."

"No—me. This one is my trick," Monte insisted.

"Hey, you two! That's Bull McGurk and two of his gang." The little fellow's voice was failing him, but his intense sincerity was unquestionable.

Sacaton turned toward him. "Say," he demanded, "you got a gun?"

"Sure I got a gun!" exclaimed the harassed barkeep. "But I'm tellin' you what's gonna happen to you if you try anything on Bull McGurk. He's *bad!* He's—"

"Let's see the gun."

The little man paused for breath. "If you're bent on commitin' suicide," he went on, "you ain't gonna use my gun, feller. You certainly ain't, see."

"Oh, you can keep your gun. I want to look at it. *Look* at it, get me. You can hold it yourself."

Suspicious, but curious, the bartender brought up from its resting place under the bar a .45 of enormous length. He held it firmly and did not approach too closely to Sacaton. The cowboy studied it as though it were some strange instrument whose purpose he could not guess.

It was just then that the low ceilinged room echoed with three shots that burst almost as one. Promptly three unsettled and overloaded chairs collapsed almost as one. In due order three hoarse throats emitted terrifying oaths almost—but this time it was more like thirty such than one.

SACATON and Monte, the smoking gun of the latter in his holster before the echoes died, were staring wide-eyed over the bar at the little man holding the gun with the enormous barrel. The little man was frozen with horror as he stared across the room. He saw three men of awful aspect rising to their feet with murder in their eyes.

"My Gawd, fella!" Sacaton Bill was exclaiming. "Ain't you got better manners, wakin' guys up thataway?"

"*Madre d' Dios!*" was Monte's aghast ejaculation. "Me, I told you to not do this thing." He turned to Sacaton. "But he win that bet—he damn' sure win that bet. We got to pay."

"We do," agreed the cowboy promptly. Both he and the Mexican produced a handful of coin and rolled two silver dollars across the bar to the involuntary winner of the bet.

"What the hell's comin' off here?" demanded the burliest, fiercest of the three who stormed up to the bar. "You Skeeter," he raged, "and what you doin' with that gun? Huh? You fire them shots?"

"No!" denied Skeeter. His voice was small, and, so it seemed, unconvincing.

"Lemme at the sawed off son of a horned toad!" begged a second man. "I'll whittle him down to—"

"Back up!" roared the first desperado. "I'll settle this."

"Fer cripes' sake, Bull, I didn't!" protested Skeeter. "Honest, Bull!"

The gentleman, evidently the terrible Bull McGurk, turned to the two calmly interested spectators at the bar. "What d'you know about this, huh? Who fired them shots?"

"We had a bet with Skeeter here," Sacaton Bill offered, obviously reluctant to testify against a friend. "He won. We just paid him."

THE Bull lived up to his name. He bellowed, and gripped the edge of the bar with rage. "You damn' little squint eyed half portion!" he shouted. "I'll shove you through a bung hole and—"

But Skeeter had dropped the gun of damaging witness and he now poured forth a flood of denial and counter accusation. His earnestness even penetrated to the rage blinded perception of Bull McGurk. The Bull listened and then demanded the gun Skeeter had dropped. It was hastily provided, and the Bull sniffed suspiciously at the muzzle. All he could smell was cleaning oil.

He shoved the gun back across the bar and turned menacingly on the two beside him. "So you're the guys, eh? You're smart, ain't you? Huh! Which one of you done it?"

Sacaton looked inquiringly at Monte, and the Mexican did likewise. "Don't tell me it was you, Monte?" Sacaton pleaded. "I can't believe it."

"Me?" returned Monte. That his friend should doubt him obviously hurt. "Sacaton, *amigo mio*—you can say that?"

Bull McGurk whirled on the barkeep. "Hey, you goggle eyed jackrabbit, which one of these birds fired them shots? Huh?"

Skeeter's eyes met the calm, fathomless gaze of Sacaton, and traveled to the dark orbs of Monte, behind which lurked a smoky fire. He shivered. But the burning anger of Bull McGurk was not to be denied.

"He did!" accused Skeeter, pointing to Monte, pale of face.

Bull emitted a low and menacing growl as he turned and glared at the lithe Mexican. Both Monte and Sacaton were now smiling, alert, negligent in appearance, but with muscles set like coiled springs.

Then Monte leaned forward, casually almost, but with no waste motion. His hand swept upward, caught the heft of a knife that protruded above the sash on his waist, and the blade swept from the sash and flashed across the room. The third of the trio of badmen uttered a sudden hoarse scream. His right hand was transfixed at his side; the steel was caught in the leather of the holster toward which that hand had indiscreetly traveled.

"Hold it, hombres!" snapped Sacaton. In his right hand was the dark metaled, sinister six-gun. Grinning, Monte Manero added a second black muzzle to the first.

The two unharmed desperadoes gaped and choked with frustrated rage, ignoring the whimpering cry of the third as he beheld his pierced hand. He stared at it fascinated, afraid to move it or to touch the knife.

"Make him give up that knife, Monte," urged Sacaton. "He'll steal it, sure as hell."

"What the—" choked Bull McGurk. "Blast you—" he choked a second time. "What's your game, huh? What the hell's the idea?" His hands were raised to his shoulders.

SACATON smiled. He watched alertly while Monte, with the deftness of a surgeon, abstracted the knife, wiped it on the fellow's sleeve, and returned it to its place in the scarlet sash. He also lifted the gun from the holster. The fellow promptly became exceedingly sick, and with a handkerchief applied to the wound, retired to a corner of the room and lost all interest in the proceedings.

"It's a long story, Bull McGurk," Sacaton Bill explained politely. "But it ain't necessary to tell all of it, fortunately. You know half of it. It's a kind of a echo of that business down at Wagon Wheel two months back."

Bull McGurk ceased to be wrathful. Instead, wonder and a flash of consternation crossed his face. "Wagon Wheel?" he repeated. "Wagon Wheel? Who—who are you?"

"Can't you guess?" Sacaton looked at Monte and the two grinned in enjoyment of the situation.

"Are you—" the Bull hesitated to utter the words. "Are you government men?"

"Right, first crack out of the box. My, you're bright, Bull," complimented Sacaton with admiration. "Too bad you weren't as bright that night at Wagon Wheel Pass when you shot up the mule train. Thought you had everybody buffaloed, didn't you? But you got fooled. Somebody saw you, and one look at your ugly face was a dead give-away."

"That ain't so. Nobody saw me—I mean I wasn't there." The Bull was worried, but he was also grim and thinking fast. "I only heard about it," he added in further extenuation.

"You're too plumb anxious to prove your innocence," Sacaton observed dryly. "Monte, tell 'em how it happened, so they'll believe me."

The Mexican grinned. He eyed the two before him with the beneficent eye of a cat stalking its prey. "First they will drop the guns," he directed. When this was done, and the belts were safe at Sacaton's feet, he continued. "I am told this story by one *paisano* who go with the mules. He hide in the brush when the fight start, and they miss him. These mule, they carry fifty thousand dollars in gold over the line, and they travel by a way no one will see them, for *el Gubernor Orizan* no can let his own people or the Americanos know he is sending so much money out of his country. But one of the trusted *tenientes* think he can use the money himself. He make the double cross with somebody this side of the border. This somebody think of one damn' fine fellow to hold up the money train. He get the Señor Bull McGurk, whose fame—" he bowed—"is known even in my country. Señor Bull and his gang wait in Wagon Wheel Pass all masked; hold up the guards and drivers, shoot up the train, and carry off the gold. Only, as Sacaton Bill say, the Bull make this one little mistake."

Bull McGurk displayed several varying emotions on his face during this recital. At its close he hesitated, and then chuckled grimly. "Well, you got your job cut out for you tryin' to prove I was at Wagon Wheel that night. I can get a dozen witnesses to testify I was right here in this saloon all that evenin'." He smiled slyly, defiantly. "And besides, you don't think I got any of that gold, do you?"

"No," assured Sacaton, "you haven't. We're not deeply interested in you. We want the other guy, the boss."

"The Boss!" exclaimed Bull. It was plain that the casual use of that name held special significance for him. "The *Boss!*" Plainly the Bull spoke of the Boss in capital letters, and if Sacaton observed the distinction he gave no sign.

"Sure!" he said. Then he added, "Don't worry about him, though. We'll take care of him all right."

The Bull edged closer. Despite his attitude of submission there was menace in his snarling lips. "What d'you know about the Boss, eh? Set me right, fella; you're not sittin' as pretty as you think." The menace on him was that of desperation, it was born of fear.

"So?" purred Monte, as Sacaton hesitated, studying the man through narrowed eyes. "You are surprise we speak of the

Boss, eh? He's one fine fellow, you bet. He can talk, this fellow, and when he talk he say something."

"That's a damn' lie!" burst out Bull McGurk. "He couldn't—"

"Couldn't what, hombre?" encouraged Monte.

"He couldn't talk, dammit! Why,—" But the Bull subsided abruptly.

"No?" The Mexican's eyes lighted with an unholy glee. "You will see. Eh, Sacaton? Will he not see, this *mal hombre* whose eyes are like those of my aunt's pet goat?"

The Bull turned on the companion beside him. "Was you lyin' to me, you son of a coyote?" he demanded.

The other glared sullenly for a moment. "I was not," he asserted belligerently. "I did just what you told me. And I told you just what the Boss did. He said he'd be here—"

"All right, flannel mouth," rasped the Bull. "I heard your story before. Shut up before you get in trouble."

"I ain't lyin'," the other mumbled sullenly.

SACATON and Monte exchanged glances during this exchange, and there was mingled satisfaction and mystification in their eyes. Plainly the affair was getting fearfully bogged down. Sacaton Bill hefted his gun thoughtfully and spoke. "I think you birds better cool off a while. Best place I know is right here." He turned to Skeeter, who was backed up against the shelves behind the bar in pallid dumbness. "Open up your cellar, Skeeter; you're going to have guests."

Monte walked around to the end of the bar to oversee the operation, and the bartender spent little time in reflecting on the matter. He avoided the eyes of Bull McGurk and plucked a key from a nail on the wall. With this he opened a trap door in the floor back of the bar. The cool darkness of the cellar yawned in the opening when the door was raised.

"Git, you fellas!" Sacaton ordered cheerfully. "Downstairs."

The Bull opened his mouth to protest, but Monte fingered the heft of the knife in his waist and the badman reconsidered. With his lips in a thin hard line he strode behind the bar and descended the steps. His companion followed him, as did the third, who was now recovered, though subdued and greatly concerned over the hand he nursed.

Out of the darkness below as they were about to lower the trap door came a voice. "You two may think you got something on us, but let me tell you—if you get out of this town alive it'll be nothing less than the whole U. S. Army that rescued you!"

SACATON and Monte called for whisky and drank gravely and silently when the trap door was closed. For several minutes they were absorbed in thought. Skeeter watched them, polishing glasses the while. He had been thoroughly cowed by their threat to take him apart if he made an indiscreet move.

"Monte," began Sacaton, as some obscure line of thought began to form within him, "there's a plumb enormous nigger in the wood pile somewhere here. Seems he's so big we ought to spot him pronto."

"Did you observe, *amigo*," suggested the Mexican, "that this Bull hombre made to shut up his friend just when he was about to tell of the Boss coming here? You think this person might be on his way now?"

Sacaton thought and slowly he smiled. "Man, that's one plumb bright idea. Now I wonder—" He turned to the barkeep. "Say, little one, how long these fellas been in here today?"

"Since dinner time," Skeeter promptly responded.

"Drinkin'?"

"Uh—no. They took one snooter and sat down by theirselves."

"Don't look right, them stayin' sober for a couple hours in a saloon," Sacaton observed to Monte. "But if they was waitin' for somebody important, now, they might restrain theirselves for once."

"And if this somebody show up—"

"We'll be here to greet him!" Sacaton finished.

"We got luck, *amigo*," grinned Monte with a flash of gleaming teeth. "First this *paisano* is so scare he can hardly remember what he see—yet he tell us one thing very important. Next Bull McGurk disappear—yet we hear he is in Alguna; we come—and he is here. We know there is somebody higher up but cannot find him—all we got to do is wait here and he come to us. *Por Dios*, we have one lucky star, no?"

SACATON BILL grinned lazily. "Maybe we'll need it, fella. This town's due to wake up about now, and she's one tough little settlement. Bull McGurk ain't here with only *two* friends." He ceased to speak and grew oddly alert. In the mirror he saw a pair of boots halt outside the swinging doors—evidently studying the strange horses at the rail. Monte turned sideways to the bar and his hand fell casually to his waist so that he covered the haft of the knife. They both waited, silent, languid—and ready.

A tall, heavy jawed man with beetling brows pushed through the doors. His eyes swept about the room instantly, yet covertly, and finding the pair at the bar the sole customers, he advanced with a light of curiosity and suspicion in his gaze.

"Whisky," he specified tersely to Skeeter. The little man slid the bottle and glass across the bar and avoided the newcomer's eyes. But the tall man was anxious to read the flushed face of Skeeter. "Where's Bull?" he demanded.

There was a trace of appeal in Skeeter's voice as he answered. "I dunno. He—" But the bland, concentrated scrutiny of the wordless pair before him drained him of all courage. "I dunno. I ain't seen him." He was rewarded by slight but approving smiles on the faces of Sacaton and Monte. Yet he wiped his brow of the cold perspiration it bore.

The big man grunted sceptically and stared at the two once more. He was finally moved to speech. "Strangers?" he inquired with grudging half courtesy.

"Uh-huh!"

But this reply evidently did not please the fellow. He frowned and faced about more directly. "From where?" he demanded.

Now this was open discourtesy. Sacaton frowned in turn. "Arizona, Missouri, Idaho and points east," he answered. Then before the other could figure that out he added, "You a friend of Bull McGurk's?"

The man's face grew still and expressionless, though his eyes glowed. "Maybe. What if I am?"

Monte toyed idly with his glass, oblivious, but Sacaton smiled with open satisfaction. "Hell, I might have guessed! He said to tell you—he's hidin' for a while."

The big man was incredulous. "Hidin'? Where?"

Mysteriously Sacaton beckoned with a finger, glancing about to insure their privacy. He led the suspicious badman to the end of the bar and lifted the trap door. The fellow glanced down into the darkness, and warned by some sudden instinct he whirled to get himself safely out in the open again. But Monte was right behind him, his gun presented to the big man's middle, and his teeth flashing in a wide grin.

"You go so soon, hombre?" he inquired.

"Bull's down there," informed Sacaton. "Go ahead and join him."

The man felt his gun being lifted from his holster from behind, but he dared not move. "Hey, Bull!" he demanded. "You down there? What the hell—"

A voice answered out of the darkness. "For cripes' sake, did you let yourself get jobbed too? Of all the—" The rest was matter of no immediate bearing on the subject, being words more or less theological in nature. The big man perforce went down the steps, lobster red of face from the indignity he had received above and the reception he was being accorded below.

Sacaton and Monte took their posts at the bar again and refilled their glasses. They were solemn, and when Sacaton drew his gun and with the sharpened front sight scratched four marks in a row on the worn bar, they drank gravely to the occasion.

That was not their last drink. Almost identically the same procedure was followed when a second arrival came demanding the whereabouts of Bull McGurk and the antecedents of the strangers. The profanity from below was somewhat stifled this time. Again a mark was made on the bar top and the feat toasted with good rye.

Soon thereafter there came sounds of loud argument up through the stout floor. The words were indistinguishable, but in the cool darkness sparks and intense heat must have been generated, judging by the general tenor of the noise. Sacaton and Monte became nervous, for a third customer would surely be warned even as he stepped in the door.

THE inevitable arrived. A pair of boots showed themselves under the swinging doors. They remained there for a moment, but they indicated that the man faced in, rather than toward the horses. The pair at the bar did not wait to figure out that oddity. With an imprecation Sacaton threw one arm about Monte's shoulder, slumped against him with astonishing awkwardness, and burst into a raucous braying.

It took the Mexican fully a minute to gather himself after his surprise at Sacaton's behavior, and at least another to realize that the awful sounds issuing from Sacaton's capacious mouth were supposed to be song. Nothing loth thereupon, he joined in the chorus, and as the man outside pushed through the swinging doors, the combined bellow of the two effectively drowned out the echoes of the arduous session going on below.

She is more to be pitie-e-d than cen-sured,
She is more to be hel-l-ped than de-spised.

The newcomer stood in the center of the floor, an owlish expression on his face as he regarded the duet. He teetered to and fro gently and began to keep time with one hand. He was an unshaven unkempt individual with battered boots and a hat that flopped in despair of ever resuming its original dignity. Finally he wobbled up to the pair and joined his croaking voice to the song.

Do not scorn her with wo-ords fierce and bit-ter,
Do not laugh at her sha-ame and down-fall—

But this was too much. The song weakened and died, and the owlish individual finished the chorus by himself. Sacaton and Monte took a good look at him and with common accord filled their glasses once again. They needed it. Even the argument downstairs subsided.

The newcomer grinned toothily at his recent fellow songsters and leaned against the bar. "Whisky, Skeet," he requested. "Ain' had a drink fer a week."

Sourly the barkeep set up a glass, pouring the liquor himself before offering it to the arid individual. Picking the glass up from the bar, the fellow regarded it in the light. "Heresh to good ole redeye!" he toasted with ardor. "Frien' o' man! Happinesh! S'ree cheers!"

The three cheers, however, were not rendered. The arid one paused and lapsed into sudden silence. From below came a series of muffled sounds. They echoed through the solid floor, weird and meaningless. The newcomer looked about him, slightly pope-yed. Reading nothing in the faces of the others he stared incredulously at the glass in his hand. There came a startling increase in the buried sounds. The frowsy one trembled, placed the untouched glass on the bar with extreme care, headed himself with precision, and started across the floor in a determined if shaky manner. He hit the doors and passed outside with a bang.

THEY were free from interruptions for some time after this. Seemingly the little town slumbered on, or else remained indoors for various reasons. It was a hard town, but the discretion of the permanent population when Bull McGurk and his men were present was, to say the least, understandable.

The bottle on the bar grew lighter as time passed, and Sacaton and Monte essayed various means of relieving the ennui of their wait. They were philosophers, and trusting perforce to fate in the present affair, they never paused to doubt that their victim was on his way to walk into their toils.

They discussed at great length the feasibility of outlining Skeeter's form against a wall with knives. Monte asserted ardently that he could perform the feat, but Sacaton warned him with gory detail of the result of a miss. Monte scorned to consider such an eventuality, but it may be believed that Skeeter did not share his optimism. Sacaton offered to try it with six-guns, but here Monte's assurance failed him, and though he expressed willingness to make the attempt, he admitted that very likely his bullets would fly an inch or two off the point of his aim.

It was Skeeter himself who settled the argument. Timidly and pale of face, he suggested that they sing again, explaining that he enjoyed their previous effort immeasurably. The pair were flattered beyond words. Linking arms, and waving refilled glasses, they responded generously.

They were in the midst of:

My gal's a high born lady,
She's black but not too shady,
Feathered like a peacock—

—when the swinging doors swung open forcibly before the entrance of a barrel chested man, wearing tan riding breeches, an embossed cartridge belt, a pointed black mustache, and a scowl. He also carried a riding crop, and as his eyes returned from a swift survey of the room in seeming disappointment, he tapped his leg with the crop in impatience.

He came straight to the bar. "Bull been here?" he demanded of Skeeter as he poured a drink from the bottle the barkeep presented.

Again Skeeter glanced appealingly at the pair. Again Sacaton and Monte eyed him with bland and innocent stares—stares which made him shiver in his boots. He returned to the newcomer. "I—I—he ain't here, Carver. He ain't been here quite a while."

The big man considered, tossed off the drink, and like the previous customers, turned to survey the pair at the bar. He saw but two half intoxicated riders, punchers probably, though obviously top hands, and his lip curled slightly in contempt of their befuddlement. What he failed to see was the fast thinking that was going on behind each deceptive face, for Skeeter had told them enough to start a whole express train of thought and deduction. "Carver!" Carver Sam McCall—the most dangerous and sinister figure in the whole border country! Carver, who won his name by his deadly record with the knife!

A GLOW that could not be suppressed came into Monte's eyes. His right hand strayed in spite of him toward the haft of the weapon at his waist. Monte too had acquired a reputation of sorts. It could never equal that of Carver Sam, but he felt a thrill of desire to match his skill with this man. Without waiting for a cue from Sacaton, he spoke.

"You look for Bull McGurk?" he inquired softly.

Carver Sam readjusted his first estimate of the Mexican immediately. Monte was no longer befuddled. His face was slightly flushed and his eyes glinted strangely, but he stood, slightly bowed of shoulder, squarely on two feet.

"I do," said Carver Sam, bluntly. "Where is he?"

Sacaton cut in, as though sensing the emotion that moved Monte and fearful of an indiscretion. Sacaton knew now who the Boss was. "He said he was sorry to disappoint you, Carver, but he had a previous engagement. Very pressing engagement."

"That so?" commented McCall, somewhat opaque of eye. He stood immobile, a bull-like figure of a man, handsome in a brutal fashion and impressive in his sheer animal strength. Strapped to his left forearm, and concealed by the shirt sleeve, they knew, was a knife with a blade of the finest steel, perfectly balanced and sharp as a razor. It was no knife for rough work; it was the tool of a specialist, created for its purpose. Carver Sam at ten feet had killed men who had gone for their guns before he touched his sleeve.

He was a mysterious figure in border life, a man who gained fortunes and spent them with equal facility, a man devoid of pity and remorse, a man who courted danger, avoided entanglements with the law, and boasted a perverted, almost oriental code of honor. In and out of Mexico, riding on the crest of one revolutionary wave, disappearing into thin air when another swamped it, he was rumored to be involved in every deviltry that ever was hatched along the border.

He grunted sardonically as he studied the men before him. "If Bull McGurk had a previous engagement," he said, "it's none of his doing. Bull knows what's good for him. If he had to tear down the walls to get in, he'd be waiting for me in this saloon now."

Sacaton's eyebrows raised politely. "That so?" he replied with dignity. "Not knowin' the gent, I can't say myself."

"What's your game?" Carver asked bluntly.

"Game?" Sacaton's face expressed his pain at so ungenerous a thought. "Listen, old settler—"

"Cut the introduction. Start in the middle," requested the Carver. "You government men?"

"Funny!" Dryly Sacaton chuckled, reaching for the tobacco sack in his shirt pocket. "Bull asked that same question himself."

Carver made no comment. He was making further revisions in his estimate of this mysterious pair. Being wise, he had nothing to say until he saw all his cards, for these two held the deck.

"Bull was plumb upset this afternoon," Sacaton went on. Into his amiable mockery there began to enter a touch of hardness. "Fact. It was us told him of his previous date, and us who persuaded him to keep it. He was right willin'."

If Sacaton hoped to bluff Carver Sam he was to be disappointed. The big man smiled slightly, ironically, and continued to listen.

"We come here on a matter of a shipment of gold," Sacaton informed him. Pointedly he added, "We expect some talk."

A flicker of a frown passed over the Carver's brow and his green eyes clouded with something like mystification. "I'm afraid I don't know what you're talking about," he said.

"Oh," exclaimed Sacaton ironically, "you admit you had nothing to do with it, eh?"

"If you know me, hombre, you know I never admit anything."

"Then it looks like we got some work to do," sighed Sacaton in a regretful voice, "which ain't going to be any too pleasant for you."

MONTE, who had listened in smouldering silence to one side, drew close. He spoke to his partner, though he kept his eyes on Carver. "I should like to try to make this one talk. He is a great one with the knife. Maybe he would touch blades with me." Monte's six-gun was in his hand like a flash as he spoke. "Take his gun, *amigo*. We will use only the knives."

"Hey, lay off, fella!" protested Sacaton. "You quit drinkin', too. I ain't aimin' to run no butcher shop!"

The Mexican laughed softly. "Take his gun. Don't worry. He will talk when I am through."

"For the love of Pete—!"

"*Amigo*," snapped Monte, "you trust me? Then do as I say."

Sacaton complied, but with reluctance. He knew what the Carver could do with a knife. He knew, too, pretty well, what Monte could do, but it did not save him from a great fear for the Mexican. This would be no ordinary duel. Sacaton's mouth was grim as he stepped back with the Carver's gun in his hand.

Monte edged away from the bar, drawing the knife from his sash as he went. Carver Sam, after studying the faces of both men intently for a sign of treachery, began to smile. The smile was a cruel thing, an outward sign of the ruthlessness of the Carver's soul. He could not guess the meaning of this affair, but he trusted too much in his own skill and good luck to trouble with fear. The Mexican asked for it. Well, he would get what he wanted.

The Carver moved toward Monte, and the slender bladed knife was in his right hand like a flash of light.

Warily the two faced each other, edging sideways slowly. They both held their knives point forward, almost in the manner of swords. This was not a dagger fight, to be won by a single backing stab. The knife had to be thrust so as to disengage immediately as the combatant retreated.

They came close, within striking distance, Monte lunged. Carver stepped nimbly aside and brought his knife upward in a tearing slash. It cut only air, for Monte had seen it coming. They stared at each other.

Suddenly they leaped simultaneously, and changing tactics as they dove, caught each other's wrists with free hands. Deadlocked, they wrestled to and fro without a word, while their temples pulsed with the strain of the exertion. The Carver abruptly snapped his right hand free, exposing himself as he did. His own left hand very nearly helped drive Monte's blade into his vitals. But the two were apart again, breath coming faster, unharmed.

There followed for many minutes a battle as even in skill and advantage as ever was fought. The Carver was heavier, his attacks were irresistible, but Monte was too wise to offer resistance when his own deft evasions served him better. His own flashing lunges seemed inescapable, but Carver Sam had the back of his own blade ready to receive them like a fence of steel.

They became more desperate, more reckless. Once Carver Sam threw his body directly at his adversary, parrying as he went, courting a fatal thrust for the opportunity of making one himself. He got no real chance, but the right sleeve of his shirt was slit from shoulder to wrist and the flesh showed red beneath where it had been raked by the blade. Monte himself suffered in that moment; his neck below the left ear bore a gash that was only a shade from closing cases on another victim of the Carver's knife.

AS THEY gained in respect for each other's skill, they became more and more determined to win. They closed repeatedly, while the knives flashed in bewildering rings of light about them, seeking for the opening they could not find. Their clothes were ruined, both by tears and gashes and by the stains of blood that seeped from a dozen superficial scratches. They breathed harshly, fiercely.

Then it was over in a second. The light-footed Monte did a most daring and unexpected thing. He hooked a foot behind Carver Sam and simply threw him backward off his feet. The big man landed flat on his back with a crash, and he was still dazed when Monte sat astride him, his knife caressing the Carver's throat.

"You will—talk—eh, hombre?" Monte demanded between heaving breaths. "You are close to death now—Señor Carver Sam."

McCall lay inertly, staring up into the gleaming eyes of the Mexican. He did not try to speak while he breathed so deeply, yet there was no perceptible fear in his eyes. His gaze was inscrutable, and it became ironical and tauntingly defiant.

"You can use a knife, *amigo*," he said. "But it wasn't the knife that won for you."

"It was the Señor Carver's slowness, no?"

McCall shrugged his shoulders, careful not to tempt the keen edge of the blade at his throat. "A boy could use the knife as you have it now," he said. "You're welcome to the glory."

"I want no glory," grinned Monte. "What I come here for is gold. You will tell where it is now?"

A frown appeared on the calm face of McCall. For a moment he stared at the Mexican. "I'm telling you flat, hombre, I don't know what you're talking about," he stated. "Explain. Maybe we even have some interests in common."

Sacaton had approached near the fallen man. He was studying the Carver's face and now he addressed him soberly. "We might at that. Easy on the knife, Monte, till we get this straight. Carver, you say you don't know anything about the hold-up of the mule train at Wagon Wheel?"

The Carver's face was suddenly transformed. "Wagon Wheel?" he repeated with astonishment. Slowly his eyes grew flat and cold with inward anger. "Then there *was* a hold-up there after all, eh?"

"Sure. Bull McGurk pulled it off with neatness and dispatch."

The Carver grinned wryly. "So!" he remarked. "I see now. The Bull had a different story. No wonder he wouldn't wait. I got an idea he'd be mighty hard to find right now."

"You like to see him?"

"I would!" The words snapped with menace for the Bull.

Sacaton and Monte looked at each other. The Mexican slowly withdrew the knife. Sacaton scratched his head wryly and came to a decision. "All right, Carver—you will."

HE HELPED McCall to his feet, though the man needed no aid; led him solicitously across the room and behind the bar. There he lifted the trap door. The silence from below was palpable.

"Go right down," invited Sacaton. "You'll find him there."

McCall stared narrowly at Sacaton, but the invitation obviously brooked no refusal. He shrugged his shoulders, glancing at the hand Sacaton held on the butt of his gun, and descended the steps, indifferent to whatever danger might be lurking in the mysterious darkness.

Sacaton and Monte did not put into words for some moments the thoughts aroused by this latest turn of events. The Carver claimed to know nothing of the hold-up. The Bull as good as admitted staging the affair. Each, in his own way, was pretty certainly telling the truth.

"This Bull—he is one wise hombre," remarked Monte.

Sacaton grunted.

"He agree to work for Carver Sam," pursued the Mexican, "but he soon think he is very foolish to share the profits when he do all the work."

Sacaton looked at Monte. "You think so, too, eh?"

"Why not?" the Mexican shrugged. "The Señor Bull is the one we must—how you say?—talk turkey with."

"You figger Bull McGurk has the shipment?"

"You bet. He double-cross everybody all around. I tell you he's one very smart hombre, this Bull."

From below there gradually became audible sounds of renewed conflict, in which the voices, if not the words, could be distinguished. Insistent, cold and fearless, Carver Sam McCall was laying down the law; hoarse and full of ire, Bull McGurk was stormily maintaining his point—which point, beyond a doubt, was his innocence in the matter of a hold-up at Wagon Wheel. After plundering the train he had secreted the loot and returned to McCall with a story of failure. It was simple, obvious, and commendable in an ambitious crook dealing with other crooks no less ambitious.

In a corner against the wall behind the bar, Skeeter remained immobile. He had neither moved nor spoken for many minutes. His fear-haunted eyes were lit only with despair. The two leaning thoughtfully over the bar paid no attention to him.

Then the tenor of the voices below changed. For a time there was silence. It was interrupted by certain sounds indicating physical effort, the moving of heavy obstacles, the creaking protest of splintering boards.

"You sure, fella," Sacaton demanded of the barkeep, "that there's no other way out of that cellar?"

"N-no!" protested Skeeter. "Honest to Gawd—I ain't lyin'."

"Huh!" Sacaton's grunt was sceptical, but he merely keyed up his hearing faculties to interpret the noises from below.

However, silence fell once more. Then it was broken by a cry of anguish, which in turn was echoed by curses. There came a sound of feet tramping on the stairs and a thumping on the under side of the heavy trap door.

"HEY! Let us out! We been double-crossed! Hey open the door!"

Sacaton glanced at Monte, and saw wonder on the Mexican's face that reflected his own. They both moved behind the bar together, opened the padlock, and heaved the door upward. The Bull stood just below, Carver alongside, and the rest of the prisoners crowded behind them.

"Put up the guns," snarled the Bull. "The fight's over. We all been jobbed. Look!" And he held out a number of circular metal slugs of a dull gray color.

The two above had their guns out in readiness, but Sacaton took the slugs from the Bull's outstretched hand in wonder. "What—what are these for?" he queried.

"Nothin'!" bawled McGurk. "They ain't no damn' good at all. That's the point. There's a coupla thousand of them things down here, all done up in little kegs. I lugged them here all the way from Wagon Wheel thinkin' they was gold—and somebody had already switched the stuff for hunks of lead!"

"Great grief and leapin' horned toads!" gasped Sacaton. He backed away from the trap door and dazedly put away his gun. The gang in the cellar sensed his lack of resistance and filed up from their place of confinement. They were all glum with the exception of McCall, who concealed his emotions behind an expression of dry satisfaction at the disappointment of his henchmen.

"That stuff never crossed the line," the Bull declared loweringly. "I'd give three fingers off my gun hand to be alone once with the buzzard that monkeyed with the gold. Huh!" A final growl expressed the rage he could not put into suitable words.

THEY all foregathered at the bar and helped themselves from the bottle that rested there unguarded. In their common disaster all animosity was forgotten. Skeeter had seemingly seized his opportunity to escape during their distraction. In any case he was gone.

The Bull detailed his woes further. "Sure I played a double-cross," he declared belligerently, though the now pointless accusation had not been voiced. "That's what you was all doin'—why shouldn't I? I packed the stuff in here at night without openin' it. I didn't dare show it yet. Skeeter would keep his mouth shut—you're damn' tootin' he would, after I ordered him to."

"*Sangre d'Christi!*" exclaimed Monte. Vehemently he demanded, "But who now has this gold?"

"Hell, anybody in Chihuahua is likely to be sittin' pretty with it right now!" McGurk retorted.

Sacaton had been thinking with intense concentration. He spoke slowly as though from mature reflection. "No," he said flatly. "Nobody in Mexico has that gold. They couldn't have."

"Why not?" Carver Sam cynically inquired.

"Because me and Monte is both aides-de-camp of ole Orizan himself. You bet we know."

"You and *who?*" exclaimed the Bull, while the others turned in startled surprise. "Monte? Is this guy Monte Manero?"

The Mexican grinned—most pointedly at Carver Sam McCall. His late adversary was staring through eyes that strove to conceal his surprise.

"You know now, maybe," Monte asked

gently, "why I seek to fight with knives the renowned Señor Carver Sam McCall?"

McCall grinned slowly. "I guess I do." The sporting streak in the man came uppermost. "Monte Manero—the slickest knife in all Mexico! You're the only man ever got the best of me. It don't hurt to be licked by the famous Monte. Sometime maybe we'll have the chance to try it again."

"Your obedient servant, señor!" said the Mexican with grinning bow.

"Hey!" Bull McGurk interrupted. "Who's this guy then? This must be Sacaton Bill Callahan!"

"His Excellency's trusted lieutenant," drawled Sacaton with another bow and a lazy grin.

"Jumpin' H. Cripes!" said the Bull slowly. "And I thought you was government men."

"We are," assured Sacaton. "You didn't ask which government!"

FURTHER explanations were interrupted by the odd arrival of two men from the street. They came through the entrance suddenly, and the doors had not swung closed behind them when they were halted side by side, standing easily, hands near guns, eyes coolly sizing up the gathering before them. They were lean, weathered men, clad in dark riding clothes, and their calm, almost amiable faces could deceive no one of that country as to their deadly efficiency if provoked to action. Two guns hung from the waists of each.

"Lookin' for somebody, fella?" inquired the Bull. His shaken sensibilities could endure no more mysteries.

"Not exactly," replied the older of the pair. He was a grizzled haired old-timer of uncertain age but definite alertness. "We just ambled in to take a look-see."

"Come and have a drink then," invited the Bull. He was suspicious, purveying the hospitality of a truce.

The odd pair sauntered up to the bar. Complacently they poured drinks and downed them in silence, while the eight men watched them with curiosity. They wiped their lips. The younger man then left the bar and returned to the door. When he stood facing the crowd again the second man turned his back and walked composedly over to join him. Together they faced their mystified audience, friendly, smiling—but ever alert.

"We thought you fellas might be interested in knowin' that the little barkeep is tied to his bed in his shack down the street," the spokesman announced.

"Huh?" said the Bull.

"We left him there for safe keepin' while we packed up a certain lot o' contraband," continued the old-timer with his imperturbable smile.

"Contraband!" Sacaton abruptly repeated. "My ——, man—you mean—?"

"You know what I mean, Sacaton Bill," the stranger grinned. "So does Monte Manero, and Carver Sam, and Bull McGurk."

"The gold of Orizan!" Monte exclaimed in a cry of despair.

The old-timer nodded. "We're takin' it away with us. Near as I can figger from Skeeter's story, which we scared out of him not five minutes ago, he switched some lead slugs for the—contraband—knowing it hadn't been opened. He ducked a little while ago and was gettin' set to beat it with a couple of pack horses when we jumped him. Seems he figgered the jig was up."

The Bull edged forward. His hand seemed to waver in the air above his gun and his eyes burned with a mad desire to frustrate the cool effrontery of this pair.

"You said you was takin' the gold?" he growled. "You got another think coming, by ——"

The old-timer grinned even more widely. His left hand held aside the coat lapel and a silvered badge gleamed in the shadow. It was recognizable instantly—the sign of office of a United States marshal.

"You goin' to buck Uncle Sam, boy?" the marshal queried softly. "Uncle Sam claims that gold—for the present anyway."

The Bull wavered visibly, and after a moment of glowering indecision abruptly turned his back to the pair and retired to the bar in defeat. The others—even Carver Sam—subsided and offered no argument. The badge of a U. S. marshal was a talisman they dared not defy. The old-timer grinned.

Then Sacaton Bill Callahan and Monte Manero did a characteristic thing. Their glance of mutual inquiry was brief. Following it, they shrugged their shoulders, dropped their glasses on the bar and strode across the floor.

"FELLA," said Sacaton, "down where we started from there'd be hell a-poppin' should we return without the stuff. Automatically and unanimously we are no longer citizens in good standin' of the thrivin' land of frijoles and hot lead. Not anyway till another revolution comes along."

The marshal nodded understandingly.

"Well, we're a pair of fightin' fools, Mister Marshal, and we need a job. Monte here was born north of the line. I'm still a gringo, should anybody inquire. I nominate us for a couple of special deputies to go along with the gold."

The marshal stared into Sacaton's eyes with a shrewd and penetrating gaze. Then he smiled. "I know that Sacaton Bill Callahan has done enough to put him in Leavenworth for life," he remarked, "but among his ill-doin's nobody ever said he broke his word."

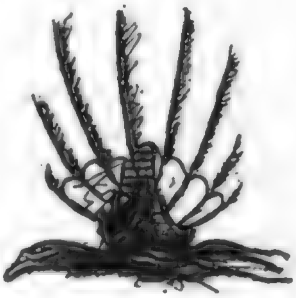
"Me, I would like to speak with that guy," assured Monte with gleaming teeth. "Only once would he say it!"

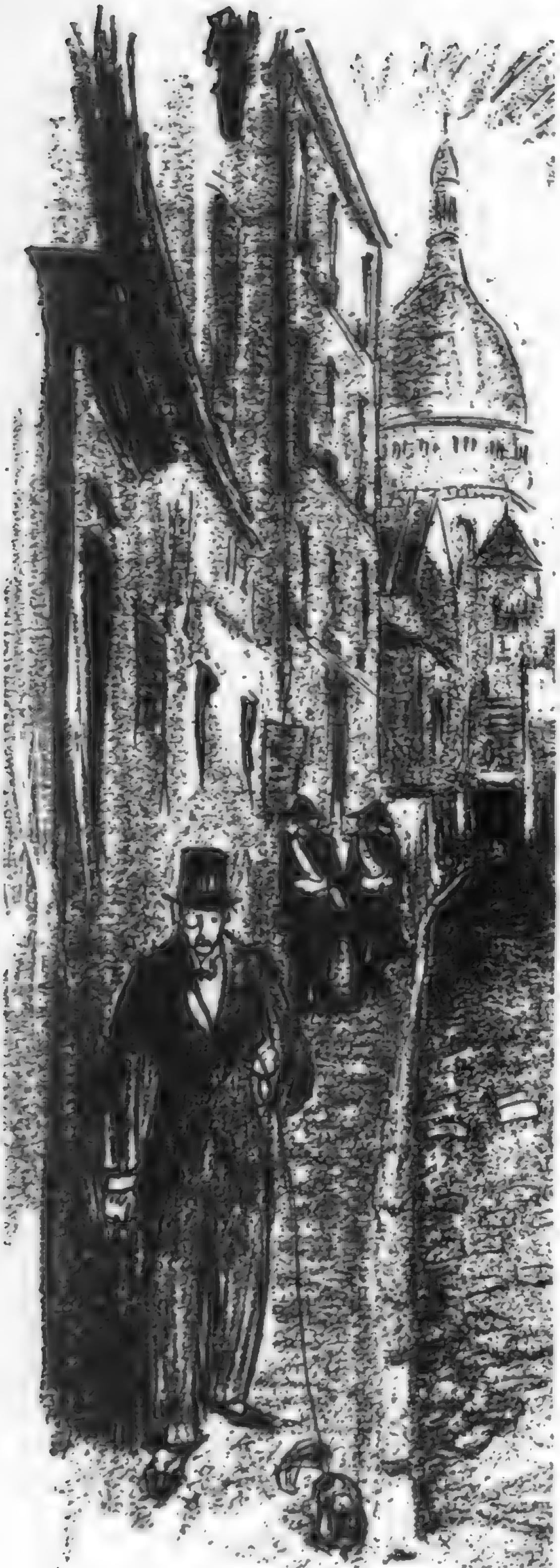
"Then come along," invited the old-timer. "I got no job for you, but I like your company. I never had any respectable friends anyway."

"I wasn't even born respectable," grinned Sacaton. "My daddy was a law officer back in Arizona. Let's go then. I'll sing for you to while away the hours." He turned. "Thanks for the drinks, *amigos*," he called.

"*Hasta luego!*" added Monte, bowing.

And the swinging doors closed behind them with a gentle thud in the silence of the Silver Stallion Saloon.





ARED WHITE

Relates the Second Adventure of the Irrepressible O'Vane in this Novelette

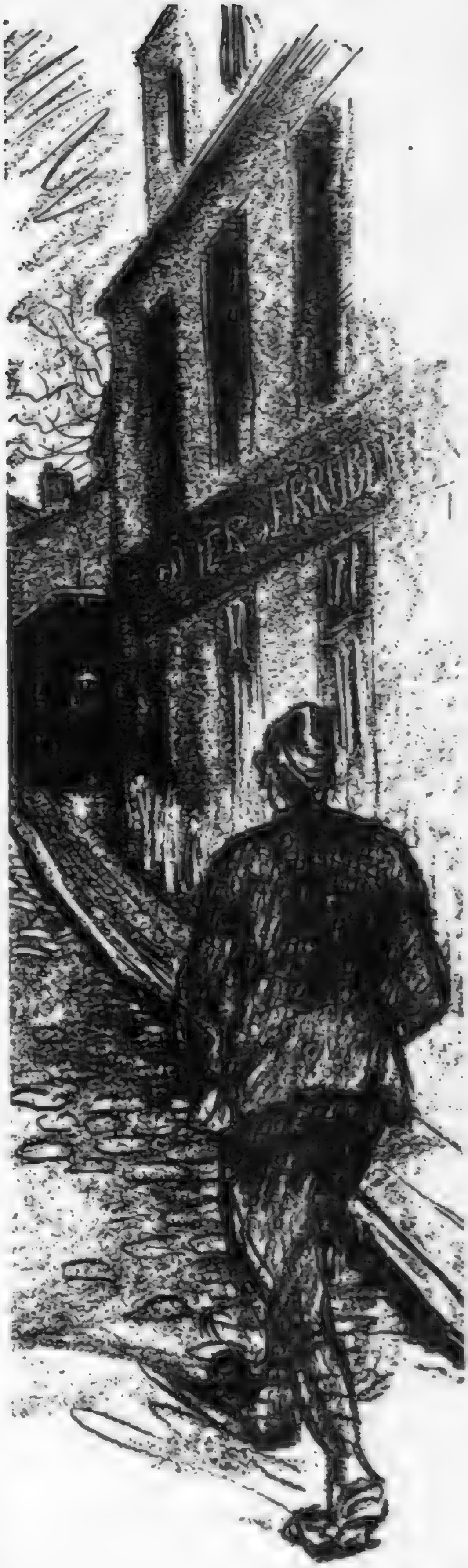
AT REVEILLE of the morrow Sergeant Joe O'Vane's three-day pass in Paris expired and he must be back for duty with regimental headquarters company in his regiment's after-the-armistice training area near Tonnaire. That meant he must tear himself away from Paris on the evening train which left in three hours—a prospect most displeasing.

Following the long wracking weeks at the reeking red front, Sergeant O'Vane's soul craved far more of diverse relaxation away from troops than could be crowded into a mere three days. Then, too, Paris had suddenly been revealed to him this very day as a fairyland of vast opportunity—opportunity such as he had dreamed of vaguely for many years. Anything could happen in Paris now in that great let-down that followed in the wake of the war.

"Sure an' wid another spell in Par-ee ol' Joe might find hisself in clover fer the rest o' me natural life" he had muttered to himself sadly.

But he had fought all this out with himself. Sense of duty to his colonel had won over the lure of twinkling Parisian lights, sparkling *vin blanc* and bounteous

O'*Vane's* Epa'lettes



opportunity. It being some four kilometers from Rue St. Anne, where he now was, to the Gare du Nord where he must catch the evening train, he set out on foot, thus forestalling further temptation to overstay his pass. Moreover, it really was necessary for him to walk since his remaining hoard of francs would barely pay for his railroad ticket and left him no margin for taxi hire. As for subways and surface cars, such modes of travel were only for the navigator skilled in the ways and language of Paris.

WHEN Sergeant O'Vane reached the point where he must turn away from Rue St. Anne to the right into Petis Champs or to the left in the direction of Rue Pigalle, he hesitated a brief instant. Either route would lead him finally to his ultimate destination. Pigalle, with its narrow winding medieval streets, was a great deal more circuitous, but at this time of afternoon it had the advantage of being empty of people. This fact quickly tipped the scales in favor of Rue Pigalle. After the merciless jostling he had received in that vast agitated sea of humanity which had inundated Paris today for the greatest procession of the illustrious Paris had ever seen, he craved the solitude of an all but deserted thoroughfare.

Some blocks along the dingy, cobbled street, Sergeant O'Vane became unpleasantly conscious of a little fuzzy-wuzzy dog wiggling in the street. The hairy poodle frolicked at the end of a long silver chain held by a strutting little dandy in civilian clothes. Sergeant Joe had been inordinately fond of dogs throughout his lifetime. But not of this particular variety of pampered lap feist. And when he saw that the man was also a cane-carrying fuzzy-wuzzy, adorned with spats, high silk hat and a small black mustache set in an oval and insipid doll face, his short-cropped red hair bristled belligerently.

"Two of a kind—they ought to be a law agin sech things!" he muttered to himself disgustedly. He turned his head haughtily toward the opposite side of the street to shut out the distasteful spectacle, while his face registered his contempt in such a certain way that the little man must understand if he looked at the sergeant.

BUT a brief instant later Sergeant O'Vane's averted eyes were brought sharply back to the dandy and his feist by a sudden and outlandish outbreak of shrill yelps. He saw a large British Tommy kicking savagely at the dog which was howling more in fear than in pain since the soldier launched an unsteady foot in one futile blow after the other. It was clear that the feist, in darting out into the street, had enmeshed the Tommy's legs in the chain, and the Tommy had taken the accident as a personal affront to his dignity as a soldier of the king. The little man was protesting impotently, both arms waving frantically. Two men, one in a strange uniform of gaudy hues, were standing by in attitudes of horror and protest, but unwilling to measure strength with the infuriated soldier.

O'Vane felt himself bristling anew, this time from a very different cause. A British Tommy was not a sight to arouse his enthusiasm, in the first place. A British Tommy in an ugly humor, kicking a helpless dog led by an undersized man, no matter what the pedigree of dog and man, was a *casus belli* in the O'Vane code, and particularly in the present O'Vane mood.

He rushed forward impulsively, seized the soldier by the collar and jerked him back with an abruptness that sent the Briton sprawling full length in the cobbled street.

"What kind o' blackguard are youse to be kickin' an inoffendin' little dog like that!" he demanded.

The Tommy scrambled awkwardly to his feet, his face convulsed with rage. "Hi'll teach ye t' meddle with 'is Majesty's soldiers!" he bellowed, rushing at Sergeant O'Vane with a powerful but clumsy swing at the old sergeant's head.

The fire of battle leaped into O'Vane's little green eyes and his wrinkled red face fairly shone as he coolly ducked the blow and dropped his hands nonchalantly behind his back. He knew he was master of the situation. The Tommy had betrayed himself as a man who knew nothing of the fine science of offense and defense in fistic battle. Brawn and fire would avail him nothing in this encounter. O'Vane calmly sidestepped and ducked his blows, thus adding insult to impending injury. At the proper moment he drew his left hand from behind his back and with an adeptness born of long hard practise in younger days when he was undefeated champion of the fifth ward back home, planted a succession of stinging jabs on the helpless giant's exposed face, the while moving skilfully around him and avoiding his bull-like rushes. After a few moments of this, he brought his right hand forth and with a swift and devastating series of right and left smashes to head and jaw, hammered the Tommy off his feet.

This done Sergeant O'Vane leisurely drew forth his drab army handkerchief, flicked his hands and sleeves daintily by way of expressing his further contempt and, without so much as a glance at the man whose cause he had espoused, strode off in fine dignity. The slight to the little man with the dog was deliberate. It was entirely beneath the dignity of Sergeant O'Vane to waste glance or word on the insignificant owner of such an insignificant cur. He had not fought for them, as a matter of fact, but for an abstract principle—and there was ample reward in the sheer joy of the mêlée.

BY THE time he had covered half a block the sergeant became conscious of someone hurrying after him. Someone with a heavy foot that rang on the cobblestones with the clash of spurs. He was preparing to cope with the military police when his pursuer caught up with him—the man in the strange uniform who had been with the owner of the dog. This soldier wore the Sam Browne belt of an officer, and accosted him in some outlandish foreign tongue.

"No compree them for'n lingoes," Sergeant O'Vane announced disagreeably. "What youse want!"

"Ah, monsieur speak English," exclaimed the officer, with a very pronounced French accent. "Sir, I have ze honor to command you zat you appear zis evening at six of ze clock at zis address, sir."

He handed the sergeant a small card upon which had hurriedly been scrawled in pencil the legend;

Suite Rex, Hotel Grand Palais d'Orsay.

"Commanded!" O'Vane snarled. "What youse mean 'command?' " He felt his hair bristling again. No man can participate in a heavy encounter one minute and adopt a placidly agreeable mood in the next. Besides he was taking orders from no foreign officer on the streets of Paris over an incident growing out of the defense of a woolly dog.

"Command, yes," replied the officer evenly. "Hees Royal Majesty command zat you present you at zat hour—at zat address which I have give you."

"His Royal Majesty!" echoed Sergeant O'Vane, his whole mood suddenly lifting at these magical words. "Do youse mean the little bird wid the woolly dog?" he stammered confusedly, as he strove to adjust himself to this unheard of situation.

The officer drew himself to dignified salute and ignored the question with a slight lifting of his arched eyebrows. "Sir," he announced, "monsieur will be what you call it—ver' prompt. Hees Majesty do not like ze delay, even for one minute. Au revoir, monsieur."

Sergeant O'Vane stood with mouth agape, dazedly looking after the officer. The uniform was one that he could not recall having seen about the front and so it gave him no index to the nationality of the party. The little fuzzy-wuzzy, suddenly revealed as his Royal Majesty, was walking on unconcernedly with the woolly dog that now cavorted again at the end of the long silver chain.

His Majesty! Could it be that the opportunity that had passed him by earlier in the day, mocking at him, had sought him out, he asked himself? Was his fondest dream about to come true after all? That dazzling procession of the illustrious he had watched breathlessly that morning rose before his mind again, filling him with a new hope—and a new temptation.

PARIS was filled with kings and potentates. In one portentous procession, the greatest the world had ever staged, Sergeant O'Vane had seen them pass in review before the fluttering multitudes that very day. In one breathless, incomparable column they had passed him—kings and queens, premiers and elder statesmen, field marshals and field generals of the first water. Princes and princesses, gilded major domos and dazzling minor luminaries were the mere file-closers in that mighty concourse of the great, in Paris to solemnize the end of hostilities. Near the head of the column he had seen the President of the United States himself, come abroad to try his hand at writing into the peace pact a death warrant for all wars.

In open vehicles they had rolled majestically by him today, that brilliant ensemble of world leadership. Not fifty feet away. So near that ordinary folk could make out distinctly such intimate details as the shades and fabric of her Majesty's wrap or the pasty pallor of the illustrious one who must have dreamt too long in his study. Or the vivid coloring of the great general that hinted of strong wind and stronger grape.

Sergeant O'Vane had shouted madly as his good friend King Albert of Belgium passed by, but his voice was lost in the swelling chorus that greeted the popular King of the Belgians. He had waved frantically at the president's good friend and counsellor—the one whose orderly he had been once for a day. But his gestures were shut off by the big sorrel geldings of a flashing French cavalry escort that trotted by like an ill wind at the moment. He had given his most impressive salute to the famous French general who once had pinned the Croix de Guèrre on his breast, the while kissing him on both cheeks, all in reward for a few well delivered and complimentary phrases anent the greatness of the French in general and this general in particular. But, today, the general's eyes were fixedly penetrating the front with never a glance to his right or left flank.

Not once had happy circumstance or fortuitous incident cast a kindly rift of opportunity in the wall of inaccessibility that hedged in the mighty and held O'Vane in his unhappy place as a mere gaping atom among those millions whose rôle it was to feast their eyes and lend applause. In desperation he had turned to follow as the end of the imperial cavalcade passed him. Fortune might favor him at the point where the mighty left their vehicles. Could he but have the ear of one for a moment, or find some little service to perform, what might it not lead him to? But that dense wall of humanity that hemmed him in was as unyielding as granite. He had been forced to give up in despair. And the six o'clock train must carry him out of this enchanted realm.

Now opportunity had picked him up, come rushing after him, as he was going to his train. His gait became heavy and uncertain as he moved on down the Rue Pigalle toward the Gare du Nord. He must fight it out with himself all over again and against heavy odds this time.

IF HE missed the six o'clock train out of Paris, he reflected heavily, sun-up would find him absent without leave. That would mean the loss of his sergeant's chevrons again. After having lost them five times in his one year of war service he might not be able to regain them again. He wanted to return home a sergeant. It might help him toward a sergeancy on the police force at home when he reported back to his beat after the muster-out ceremonies at home.

On the other hand what pot of gold might lay at the end of the rainbow that now dazzled his eyes? This mysterious king must be grateful for the service he had performed, and who can say where a king's gratitude may lead? With the war over it was time to think of such things. And was not this a dream come true—a dream of finding favor with some great one, and a place in his service? Had not his one fine place, that of a market inspector, come from cultivating a mayor at election time? And had not his job on the police force grown out of the favor of a ward dignitary whose fancy he had touched with the magic of his ready tongue? And now chance had put a king in his path—a king with a king's limitless power to elevate his faithful henchman and appease every whim!

It was an unequal struggle. Yielding to a flood of impulse, Sergeant O'Vane cast aside the shackles of uncertainty, pivoted resolutely, and headed back toward Rue St. Anne and the heart of Paris. His decision gained strength and quickened his pace almost to a run. Surely his colonel wouldn't want him to offend an allied king over a little matter of reporting back to the regiment on the dot. It was not his fault that his time of reporting to his Majesty and the departure of his train for Tonnaire occurred at six o'clock and left him no possible margin for meeting both obligations.

II

AT EXACTLY six o'clock, Sergeant O'Vane, his heart in his mouth, rapped timorously on the tinted and crested door of the appointed suite at the Hotel Grand Palais d'Orsay. He had taken great care to be on time, making his way to the hotel a full half hour ahead of time in order to orient himself as he would have done in carrying out a battle movement. He had even re-set his wrist watch with the big clock in the hotel lounge and for some minutes had been standing at high tension just outside the royal suite waiting for the stroke of six.

The door opened almost the moment he touched it with his knuckles and Sergeant O'Vane snapped into his most impressive salute before the gilded functionary who appeared before him, a personage whose trappings seemed to proclaim a proud courtier. But this dazzling apparition, instead of returning the salute, bowed sweepingly and humbly, as before a superior creature.

Sergeant O'Vane, having determined in advance that he must find his way through the mysterious maze of royal ceremony by following the lead of those in the king's service, was gathering himself to return the courtly bow in kind when the officer who had commanded him to the king's presence appeared suddenly from an inner room and bustled over to him with an informal greeting.

"Ah, on ze exact minu-ute," he exclaimed in friendly but superior manner. "Hees Royal Majesty will ree-ceive you immediately, monsieur. Hees Majesty command zat you not wait. Sir, may I have ze honair of ze name, monsieur?"

"Sergeant O'Vane, sir, headquarters comp'ny, ——th Infantry, an' at his Majesty's service, sir," O'Vane managed to stammer, struggling to reduce the heavy pounding of his pulse and place himself more at ease before entering his Majesty's presence.

The officer took him lightly by the arm and led him toward the royal chamber. "Bow ver' low—and wait for hees Majesty to speak," he directed, *sotto voce*.

WHATEVER he had expected by way of royal ceremony upon entering his Majesty's presence, Sergeant O'Vane was wholly unprepared for what he saw. Instead of a robed monarch topped with glittering crown, there was the little fuzzy-wuzzy of the woolly feist, attired in civilian evening clothes. The insipidity of his round little face with its wisp of black mustache was heightened by a large monocle. He was seated before a table in the center of the room upon which was a silver container bearing an iced bottle of champagne. And on his lap was the woolly feist.

But if he felt a fleeting pang of disillusionment it was swept away on the instant as his escort announced in an impressive voice.

"Your Majesty, at your royal command I present ze Monsieur Evaine!"

Sergeant O'Vane was brought out of the conflicting emotions of the moment to his rightful place by a sharp jab in the back which precipitated him into a deep obeisance in his best imitation of the low bow of the officer. A moment later he was brought out of that posture by a clap on the back as the little man came up to him, the woolly feist dangling under one arm.

"Chawmed, old fellah," his Majesty announced democratically, his decided English accent adding to the O'Vane confusion. "It was really good of you, don't y'know, to topple that brutal ass. He was really quite awgravating."

O'Vane came out of his bow and yielded his hand to his Majesty who gave it a sharp wring and dropped it. The fact that this really was the king, invested his physical insignificance with a sudden glamour that overcame even the disagreeable effect on the O'Vane ears of his English accent. The accent now only startled him. This was not the King of England. Of that he was sure. the King of England was much older and had a beard. This one, what there was of him, was erect and straight of limb.

"Sure, it's the great honor of me whole life," Sergeant O'Vane managed to stammer. "When I sees that bird kick yer fine dog, it makes me blood boil, yer Majesty."

"Ah, Zbainski is also—ah—quite grateful to you," his Majesty exclaimed holding up the woolly feist which cast a lazy eye on O'Vane. "I call him Zbainski aftah our premier, y'know. An insult to the dawg, really, but it pleases me because so very soon I shall lead that base rascal Zbainski about on a chain, y'know."

His Majesty guffawed intemperately at this picture and his noisy mirth lured O'Vane into an easier mood in the presence.

"And now, my deah fellah, I shall reward you as befits your—ah—noble bravery," the king announced, changing his mood as abruptly as the subject.

HE GAVE an impatient toss of his hand in the direction of the officer who hastened to get for him a small leather case from which his Majesty took a long lavender ribbon at the end of which was a bulky silver maltese cross. The king took a position directly in front of Sergeant O'Vane, while the officer took post three paces in rear and slightly to left, fixing himself stiffly at the position of salute.

"I really should have a cavalry regiment of the—ah—household guards for you, deah fellah," the king announced, "but we will do it informally quite as well—and now, my good man, we, Peter, do invest you with the imperial order of our illustrious grandsire, King Peter the First in—ah—appreciation of the most gallant and—ah—conspicuous services to the Crown."

With a deft series of practiced movements his Majesty clasped the coveted Order of King Peter I. about O'Vane's thick, weather-burned neck, implanted a lusty kiss on each scarlet O'Vane cheek and then shook the limp O'Vane hand in final felicitation.

"Ah, I observe you wear the Order of Leopold," his Majesty addressed the gasping O'Vane. He scanned with friendly interest the multi-colored Belgian ribbon that had reposed on the O'Vane breast since that memorable day when O'Vane had leaped forward to open the Belgian royal limousine, announce himself a Belgian-American and receive the war bauble from the generous monarch the day the king visited O'Vane's regiment en route through the American area.

"Yessir, yer honor—I means yer Royal Majesty," stammered O'Vane, absently running his fingers across his cheeks at the point where the fuzzy black bristles had touched them a moment before. "Me fren' King Albert pins it on me breast when he reviewed me reg'ment."

"Ah, then you know Albert!" exclaimed King Peter. "A most chawming fellah, I must say. And I take it you have the—ah —honor to be in the Belgian service, yes?"

"Nosir, yer Majesty," O'Vane replied more easily. He was beginning to orient himself now in the presence and his faculties were settling back to normal under the king's friendly voice and manner. "Sure an' it's me honor to belong to best reg'ment of the greatest army in the world, yer Majesty."

"Quite so," assented his Majesty. "I should have judged it by your—ah—uniform. The British army, to be sure. I congratulate you, really."

"English army—hell," O'Vane said in a flood of disgust, before he could stop the words. "Excuse me, yer Majesty," he added humbly, recovering himself, "but that was part o' the English army, yer Majesty, I tosses into the gutter today fer kickin' yer Majesty's dog aroun'. It's me priv'lege, I says, sir, to belong to the finest army in the world—the very finest, yer Majesty!"

King Peter took not the slightest offense but he did seem to be deeply puzzled as he looked O'Vane over with studious care as if in search of some clue to his service.

"That—ah—is hardly the French uniform you wear," he reflected soberly. He brightened suddenly. "Ah, I have it—you are Portuguese!"

"Yer Majesty," exclaimed Sergeant O'Vane, pride of service rising above fear of mighty presence, "sure an' they's only one army answers to that name—the United States Army, yer Majesty. Sergeant O'Vane, sir, of the American Army."

"Ah—an American soldier!"

King Peter's exclamation was spontaneous. The information had aroused within him some quick emotion, more potent than mere satisfied curiosity or friendliness. He glanced significantly at his major domo, then issued to him a brief order.

"Count Senosky, have Bozo serve the champagne. Three glasses instead of two, you know."

III

HIS Majesty, when the champagne was poured, lifted his glass in a toast to the gallant Americans. "Deah fellah—I should have known the moment you said 'finest armee,'" he drawled graciously, standing with his glass poised. "How extraordinary that you should chawnce to be an American—quite the fellah I am in search of to—"

"Your Majesty!" broke in the major domo abruptly, as if in warning. "Your Majesty must—"

"Silence," snapped King Peter, making use of his most impressive rebuke—a crushing word he had inherited from his splendid and terrible grandsire, Peter the First. The officer blanched and closed his lips so tightly that the blood left them.

"It really—ah—has been quite in my mind," his Majesty resumed with a prompt return of his agreeable mood "that I acquire the—ah—services of a few trusted and trained Americans before I return to the palace."

"Yer Royal Majesty, sir," exclaimed O'Vane, leaping eagerly into the glorious suggestion, "youse will find Sergeant O'Vane, sir, at your service wid his very life. What youse says goes wid Sergeant O'Vane, yer Majesty."

But King Peter carried the matter no further, dropping the breathless subject as lightly as he had brought it up, his interest switching to the sudden discovery that there was no more champagne on ice within the royal chamber. He brought irritated attention to this neglect. Scalding words in a strange tongue flowed from Count Senosky to the gilded flunkey of the outer door. The dire oversight was quickly corrected.

Sergeant O'Vane found himself seated, and almost at ease between King Peter and his trusted retainer Count Senosky, who was also an officer in his Majesty's army judging by his gaudy dress uniform of blue coat and lavender breeches, set off with double rows of red stripes and surmounted by tinseled epaulettes and heavy gold aguilettes.

As toast followed toast and the convivial hours of the night drew on, the humor of King Peter rose steadily and even the stolid but alert Senosky waxed voluble at times. Little by little the fog of deep mystery that had surrounded his Majesty and his Majesty's presence in Paris lifted before their words and disclosed to Sergeant O'Vane the reality of the mighty and enchanted world on whose threshold he had been cast.

Not only had King Peter a real kingdom but he was just on the verge of coming into his own as a monarch. Sergeant O'Vane seized upon this bit of information avidly. It was something to find favor in the eyes of a king. It was something even greater to find that favor at a time when the king was getting ready to put on his crown and take up his scepter after long months of tragic exile, the while a villainous dictator held the people under his thumb. It all came out in toasts, in bits of anecdote and incident, in expositions by Count Senosky, in King Peter's mocking allusions to the once terrible but now seemingly futile Zbainski.

Young Peter, as the crown prince, had been traveling with English tutors for the benefit of his education and to keep him out of mischief during the war, when King Peter II. died quite suddenly. When the heir rushed homeward to take his throne, he was turned away at the border by Zbainski who had been stirring up feeling against young Peter on account of Peter's pronounced sympathies for the Allied cause. Was the heir apparent not a menace to the land since the Kaiser would surely win the war, the Zbainski henchman demanded!

FOR a whole year, while the war raged on, the uncrowned Peter had hung about Paris and London attended by the faithful Senosky who had done his best to keep his impulsive and somewhat irresponsible Majesty out of as much trouble as possible. Zbainski, in the meantime, had ruled as a veritable dictator and it was strongly hinted that a German victory would be followed by the permanent banishment of Peter and a permanent dictatorship headed by Zbainski.

When the Kaiser suddenly threw up the sponge, there immediately sprung up a popular clamour at home among the people for the return of young King Peter. The influence of his presence on his throne was badly needed now if the country was to placate the Allies and not risk political retribution. Even the terrible Zbainski joined in the chorus and once having climbed the royal band wagon, he headed with his own signature as premier, the appeal of the elder statesmen for Peter's return.

Negotiations for the return had been completed within the week and Peter was laying his plans to depart from Paris within a fortnight—as soon as the plans for his reception and ceremonial coronation could be completed at home. It was to be a great national gala event and the details hardly could be arranged over night.

"So soon," King Peter exulted, raising his glass in another toast, "so soon I shall lead that base rascal Zbainski about on a chain, y'know. An insult to the dawg, really, but—"

His Majesty broke off into the inevitable guffaw that followed this favorite picture. Sergeant O'Vane laughed with him. He was beginning to share the king's contempt for the high-handed premier and to enjoy the picture of the mighty one humbled thus. Count Senosky smiled in a strained sort of way that quickly faded in a look of worried apprehension.

"Zat Zbainski he is terrible!" put in the Count with an expressive shrug of his shoulders. "A terrible fellow wiz ze face of a rascal and eyes—ze eyes which look terrible at you. One eye he look through you. Ze other eye he look around ze corner to see zat no one slip up from behind."

"Merely an unusually cock-eyed scoundrel," commented his Majesty depreciatingly, adding in a more complimentary tone, "but really a brainy fellah, y'know. Used to be a barber—think of it. A little runt, too, upon my word, but a great schemer and possessed of—ah—a most remarkable head, y'know."

"Sure an' that bird'll look good on the end of yer Majesty's dog chain wid the other dogs," said O'Vane, the mood of the conversation having put him at ease for the moment.

"Clevah—deuced clevah, I'll say," exclaimed his Majesty approvingly.

"But no, your Majesty, I theenk it bettair zat you deal so gently wiz zis Zbainski, —as your father ze great King Peter do," Count Senosky broke in soberly, insistent on being serious in spite of the blithesome spirit of the festive occasion.

"An' what's the use bein' a king if youse have to take guff from a cock-eyed barber, yer Majesty," laughed O'Vane, feeling himself quite sure of his ground. "Chain the bird, says Sergeant O'Vane—or hang 'im if he gets chesty, but don't take no guff, yer

Majesty, off no little cock-eyed barber!"

"Right-o!" agreed King Peter. "Quite the American spirit, I take it. So quaintly expressed, upon my word, but quite right."

HIS mind reverted as suddenly as it had dropped it to the thought of some time ago. "I shall have you in my service, deah fellah. What service would you fawncy?"

Sergeant O'Vane gulped and his pulse resumed its pounding as this subject nearest his heart was brought before him again. And in concrete form this time! He hesitated and responded fervently but with caution.

"Whatever yer Majesty says goes wid Sergeant O'Vane," he responded, adding with a happy afterthought: "Jes' so I don't have to take guff off no cock-eyed barber."

"I should really delight to have you in my army for, after all, you are a soldier, y'know," suggested King Peter.

"But your Majesty—" interposed Count Senosky with feeling.

"There are really so few I feel I can trust," continued the king ignoring his aide entirely. "Should you fawncy a commission in the service?"

"Sure it'd be the honor o' me life to be a lieutenant in yer Majesty's army," effused O'Vane.

"Hawdly rank enough for my purpose," his Majesty replied. "I shall commission you a—ah—colonel y'know."

"But your Majesty, plees to think what—" fairly protested Count Senosky, now visibly agitated and unhappy.

"Silence!" King Peter exploded. The color disappeared again from the thin line of the count's compressed lips.

"I cawn't have men of low rank about my person," Peter expostulated. "I wish the protection of my person—ah—amply provided for. There are, as I have said, so few that I can trust, y'know. I will have a man of—ah—great courage with me."

Peter turned an accusing eye upon the unhappy Senosky. "What, might I ask, deah Senosky, did you do this afternoon when I was—ah—annoyed by that base blackguard! And you, sir, the general of a corps—a *leutnant* general of our army, egad."

The king paused, sat meditatively a few moments while neither ventured to interrupt his thought. Then with his own hand he filled the three empty glasses and arose to drink a toast, a whimsical twinkle in his eyes.

"To the very good health of my new general *de* brigade," he announced, lifting his glass.

O'Vane got to his feet gasping. Was he certain of his senses? General of a brigade! Could it be that King Peter meant him? Had King Peter, perchance, launched a few too many toasts through the hours of the night and was now saying things lightly that he would not remember when his head was aching on the morrow after a few hours' sleep. But his Majesty's hand was steady as he held the uplifted glass, and his voice was calm and easy.

No word of protest came now from Count Senosky but it was plain that his silence was one of duress. His face was clouded with suppressed disapproval and he drank the toast in an unpleasant grimace.

"And now *mon* General," said his Majesty to the demoralized O'Vane, "you shall be responsible for the security of my person. First of all you shall—ah—provide yourself with a uniform of your rank."

Peter turned to the equally demoralized Senosky. "Find the fellah a uniform—a uniform of the foot guards," he commanded.

"But your Majesty—" began Count Senosky.

"Damme," broke in Peter, "but I tire of your protests. Do as you are told, deah fellah. You and the general are of a size. Give him one of your own, I say."

IV

COUNT SENOSKY saluted stiffly and led the spluttering O'Vane out of the room in the midst of the flustered O'Vane efforts to express in one voice his gratitude, loyalty and fervent desire to die in his Majesty's service. In a luxurious chamber adjoining the sleeping apartment of King Peter, the count ordered the gilded flunkey to open an immense wardrobe trunk from which his Highness, with some show of petulance and none of enthusiasm, dashed forth a long coat of lavender tint set off in gilt trimmings, done almost in the manner of a Christmas tree; a pair of flaring riding breeches, down each leg of which there was a double line of red stripes; a gilt sash-belt with an immense rose-and-gold rosette on the left side; a silver waist belt with silver saber slings. Silver spurs with jingling rowels, shining cordovan puttees in which O'Vane could see his own face reflected, cordovan shoes to match the puttees, and much other incidental trapping completed the new O'Vane finery.

"Sure an' it'd put one o' them French admirals to shame," exulted O'Vane. "It musta cost a bale o' cash."

He turned from the uniform to Count Senosky with a joyous question that had flashed into his bewildered mind. "An' what's the rate o' pay what goes wid this outfit?" he asked eagerly.

"Ze pay of ze general de brigade in hees Majesty's army, it is eight hundred kroner, monsieur," Count Senosky replied coldly, eyebrows and nose lifting slightly.

"And how much might all that be in real money?" O'Vane blundered.

"Eight hundred kroner," retorted the count stiffly, his eyebrows and nose mounting higher, "it is eight hundred kroner—not ze one kroner more, not ze one kroner less. Genteelmen," he added with biting emphasis, "do not much speak of ze money. It is ze great honaire to be ze officer in hees Majesty's service."

"Sure an' eight hundred kroner listens like a lot o' coin," O'Vane rejoiced, unaffected by the count's affronting attitude. "An' me havin' served most o' me year in the army as a buck at thirty-three per."

WITH the aid of the tinseled flunkey he fitted himself into the array of multi-colored broadcloth, gold and spangles. It all slipped on quite as if it had been made for him—excepting the cordovan shoes. These were much too small and he winced as the valet laced them tightly to his serviceable infantry feet.

O'Vane started at the unbelievable transformation flashed back at him from the long French dressing mirror. A drab barnyard fowl miraculously transformed to a luxuriant peacock! He threw back his shoulders, shoved his chin forward and drew taut the loose corners of his broad thick mouth in emulation of the martial expression of his old colonel. It gave tone to the picture before him—added the final touches that were needed to make him look his new rôle in life.

As he gazed on in rapture at this proud transition a natural impulse rose within him. He must manage, somehow, to present the new O'Vane for the admiration of his intimates in the old regiment. How the collective mouths of F Company would fall apart at this sight. And the arrogant captains of F Company and headquarters company—how they would be humbled. Even the colonel of his regiment who had dreamed of being a general before the war ended, what would he say!

He raised his hand in salute before his own greatness that was reflected back to him from the mirror and accepted the awed courtesies of his old captains as they passed humbly before him in reverie. Not a flicker of recognition for them. But when the lads of the old second squad, and the cook of headquarters company came by it was different.

"Youse lads come wid me to me quarters. Don't be nervous 'bout me rank—fer I'm the same O'Vane wid me fren's, gen'ral or no gen'ral," he had himself saying to the men in the ranks.

And as for the cook of headquarters company—he must tell his Majesty of that genius. Nothing short of the Cross of King Peter should hang about the cook's neck. That cook made the best hot cakes in the army. King Peter should hang the order about his neck in person. He smiled at the picture of the gawkish, backward cook being kissed on both cheeks by another man.

But he would remember his friends generously, he reflected, warming under the natural desire to share some measure of his own great good fortune with those who had been human to him when he was nothing more than poor old Sergeant O'Vane. Before he had been delivered by the magic wand that had picked him up from the dismal cobblestones of Rue Pigalle and wafted him into this fairyland of royal favor.

"Hees Majesty wait alone and monsieur is ver', ver' slow," sounded the irritated voice of Count Senosky, breaking up O'Vane's delightful reverie.

O'Vane gave himself a final looking over and turned reluctantly to go with the count.

"Sure an' it fits me right off'n the bat better'n any quartermaster stuff I ever saw," he enthused. "But youse couldn't dig up a bigger pair o' shoes, could youse, Count?" he added pleadingly, looking with wry significance at the two cordovan torture devices that encased his now throbbing feet.

THE count's head lifted high, his nose rose disdainfully and his large brown eyes snapped indignantly.

"Monsieur forgeet hisself!" he protested. "You are—what you call it—too damn familiar, monsieur. Monsieur will plees to remembaire zat I am of ze famille royal—zat I am also a *leutnant* general of hees Majesty's armee and so ze superior of monsieur whom hees Majesty have seen fit to peek out of ze street. You will address me, monsieur, as 'your Highness' and always wiz ze propaire respect!"

O'Vane felt the blood rush to his face. He hovered for a moment between hot retort and discreet silence. Long experience in accepting unseasoned reprimand from higher authority decided the issue. Offending the count had been the farthest thought from his mind, but then if the count was a higher kind of general than he he must surely have a perfect right to explode. Was it not a law of the service?

"Sure an' I means no offense, yer Highness," he said stiffly, adding a very formal salute exactly as he would have done had his captain hopped on him without cause. "I jes' wants to be sure I looks right to go in before his Majesty an' besides yer Highness' shoes sure do pinch me feet."

"If monsieur do not find pleasant my boots which he wear, perhaps he will find for hisself hees own boots," retorted his Highness, quite untouched.

They found King Peter in the same high humor in which they had left him. If his Majesty was a man of royal moods at least he knew but the one mood in these first hours of regaining his kingdom. Even his occasional irritation with the arrogant Senosky was short-lived for his cup of happiness just now was filled to overflow with no dregs in sight. He greeted his new officer with effusive delight as if the transformation was a miracle of his own working which he enjoyed to the utmost.

"My word, deah fellah, you look topping, I must say!" Peter exclaimed. "Really look the part, y'know."

"Sure an' I'm glad yer Majesty is pleased wid me looks," replied O'Vane, his eyes dancing as he forgot in this happy moment of royal approval the growing torture of stricken feet.

But in the interminable interval of time that now followed, those feet gradually became the center of his universe. King Peter, who seemed lost to all sense of time in his present happy situation, turned abruptly to royal affairs of state and proceeded to confer with Count Senosky throughout the few remaining hours until dawn. O'Vane was left to his own devices, which consisted of one futile plan after another for relieving the agony of his torture. He even thought wildly of tearing Count Senosky's cordovans from his aching feet, but remembered it would never do to appear shoeless before a king, no matter what the provocation.

THE torture of these unyielding cordovans gradually filled his mind, dimming the glory of this new paradise. He pressed them against the floor, twisted them against the legs of his chair, rubbed one foot against the other to relieve the congestion of blood. But to no purpose. He tried concentrating his mind upon the royal conversation. There was little in their conversation to interest him. Once only did he rid himself of his feet temporarily. The subject had drifted to O'Vane. Count Senosky spoke in what must have been the native tongue since O'Vane was able to make out no word of the jargon. Still, it was easy to guess that Count Senosky was expressing disapproval of O'Vane. Presently King Peter broke in on the count in good English and put an end to the whole matter.

"Not another word, deah fellah," exclaimed Peter decisively. "He's really a ripping chap, y'know, and a real fighter. Quite the man to look out for my person and as for his—ah—grammah and manners, of which you complain, perhaps he will—ah—respond to a tutor, y'know. We'll not touch upon the subject again, really. Quite settled y'know."

In the joy of this most significant speech, which nailed the roof of security over his paradise, O'Vane forgot his troubled feet for quite some time. So King Peter was standing fast! This miraculous adventure was not the creature of a passing whim, born of vagrant impulse in the first rosy hours of royal good fortune. Or if it was, Peter stood by it.

But their conversation turned back at once to matters of state and O'Vane drifted back gradually to his feet. Would the royal conference never end? Would they never dismiss him that he might go to whatever place they gave him for sleep and release himself from those murderous cordovans! Once he had marched for twenty kilometers in rain and mud, with feet blistered until they bled under his heavy field shoes. He had borne it smilingly. But never before had he undergone any torture to compare with these shoes, he vowed.

Dawn presently thrust the advance guard of its first rays through the high windows and sent with them a new and sudden agony. He jerked his wrist watch before his eyes and saw the time with a start. It was the hour of reveille. The hour he was due in line at headquarters company in the regimental area at Tonnaire. He reflected upon this situation heavily. Strange it had not obtruded itself upon his paradise before during the evening. What was his true status, to be sure? Was he a sergeant of infantry, absent without leave, or a brigade general in his Majesty's army, assigned to the duty of protecting his Majesty's person?

It came to him now for the first time that some way he must manage to report back to his colonel and let him know what had happened. There was comfort in the thought that the military police in Paris hardly would recognize him in his new uniform. But that security was not enough. If he did not appear in due time he must be posted as a deserter. That would stand forever as a blot upon his good name. It might even prevent his return home on visit anon, in all his new-found glory. As these dire realizations poured in on the unhappy flood of his thoughts, he turned feverishly to some way of letting his colonel know of his high good fortune and securing his approval. His feet ceased to exist.

HIS ingenuity seized upon a plan which he went over eagerly. Why not take King Peter to review the regiment! That would enable him to go along, reconnoiter the situation and make his peace with the colonel under some golden opportunity that would be certain to develop out of such circumstances. The plan grew upon him. It would give him his chance to show himself in his new estate. And surely the colonel wouldn't dare offend a friendly king.

When King Peter finally yawned and drew back his chair at the end of his long conference with Count Senosky, O'Vane launched the first breathless step in his maneuver. All must depend upon the assent of his Majesty.

"Yer Majesty," he announced in his most persuasive voice, "me old reg'ment is the finest in the army, sir, and it would esteem it the great honor to give youse a gran' review in honor o' yer Majesty."

King Peter left a yawn half finished as he turned to O'Vane with a show of genuine interest. The idea of an American review seemed to appeal to him instantly.

"Delighted—" began his Majesty, only to be interrupted by Count Senosky, who spoke briefly in his native tongue so that his words were lost to O'Vane.

"Quite right," resumed King Peter. "Senosky most properly raises the point that I—ah—cawn't go without a very formal invitation addressed by the American commander, y'know."

"Jes' say the word, yer Majesty," gloated O'Vane, "an' I'll have youse an invitation from the colonel hisself."

"Ah, in such event, I shall be chawmed to accept," Peter announced. "I shall favor the opportunity to have—ah—friendly relations with the Americans. Might be of great help to us, Senosky, in raising a bit of loan one day, really."

O'VANE was certain of himself in his next step. With the aid of Senosky he set about writing a message to be wired to his regimental commander. In addition to raising the point that he must visé all messages that referred in any way to his Majesty, the count proved most adept to writing a proper telegram, one vested with the dignity of diction befitting the representatives of a king. O'Vane's part in the message consisted in furnishing the thoughts and the wire address. In its final form the telegram as handed by Count Senosky to Bozo for despatch to the American area read:

His Excellency, the Colonel commanding the —th
United States Infantry. Tonnaire, France.

His Royal Majesty King Peter III. has expressed a deep interest in your brave regiment period His Majesty has been deeply moved by your magnificent gallantry against our enemies comma and it is quite possible that his Majesty will consent to visit your regiment if a time is named not in conflict with his Majesty's itinerary and other duties period With assurances of my most profound regard I have the honor to be

Lt. Gen. Count Senosky
Master of the Household.

"Sure an' I can see me colonel jumpin' in the air an' tearin' his shirt off wid joy when he gets that," exclaimed O'Vane. "Youse'll get a answer as fast as the wires can burn 'em back."

V

IT WAS noon when O'Vane was brought out of a troubled sleep with a start that set him on his feet in the unholy fear that he had overslept reveillé. Then the sight of the rich furnishings of the large luxurious room with the heavy velvet canopy over the carved and polished mahogany bed in which he slept brought him back to the fact of his fairyland.

He had been awakened by the moving about in his room of Bozo, now attired less gaudily in dark-blue morning clothes, set off in gilt braid with thick gold bands about the extremity of his sleeves. Bozo was arranging a silver service on the table in the center of the room and as O'Vane leaped out of bed he hurried forward to slip a dressing gown about the O'Vane shoulders, and adjusted the lone chair at the table for him.

The sight of steam mounting above the silver service lured O'Vane to the table on the instant. He had not eaten since noon of the day before and then only the very little that his slender residue of francs would permit rather than what his splendid appetite demanded. Now he would fill that aching void.

But when Bozo lifted the silver and linen from over the repast there was disclosed to O'Vane two *petite* hard French rolls and a small pot of chocolate. In place of sugar there was the inevitable war saccharine in a small silver container. Nothing more. O'Vane turned to Bozo in disgust.

"Do youse think it is a hummin' bird yer feedin'," he snorted. "Bring me in some food—some hot cakes an' ham and stuff to fill me poor sufferin' stomach. Sure an' they'd mob youse in headquarters company fer insultin' a man's stomach wid such stuff!"

Bozo's starched face did not respond with the slightest flicker of understanding or concern as he gave sound to a few unintelligible gutturals and faded deferentially from the room.

O'Vane snapped up the rolls, gulped the chocolate, even swallowed the saccharine. Then, when Bozo failed to return, he sorrowfully drank glass after glass of water and lit his pipe to appease his stomach as he had learned to do in emergencies of battle when the ration detail was out of touch. It was a tragic substitute for a meal to be served under a king's roof; and any hope that there might be more food to follow vanished when the placid flunkey finally reappeared bearing a letter on a silver tray. As he turned to go Bozo ceremoniously stripped the table of its silver and linen.

The message was from Count Senosky. It told O'Vane, in a series of gracefully scrawled pen flourishes, that his Majesty would arise at two o'clock and be ready for his daily stroll in the Bois de Boulogne an hour later. O'Vane would present himself promptly at that time prepared to accompany his Majesty.

THIS thrilling word from the center of his new world threw him into hurried preparation for the adventures of the day. It brought his high fortune of yesterday back into the foreground and his stomach was forgotten as he shaved himself and maneuvered into his complicated uniform. Not until he came to the pulling on of Count Senosky's undersized cordovan shoes did he remember the damnable torture of his borrowed finery. He turned away from them and took up with longing eye his heavy field shoes. What a comfort there was in those American Army brogans, after all. But the hideous contrast of such nondescript footgear under glistening cordovan puttees put them out of the question. O'Vane set his chin and forced his feet into Count Senosky's undersized shoes. There was no way out of it. He must smother his pain until he could find a way to larger shoes.

"Sure an' I can put up wid a bit o' sufferin'," he assured himself.

His Majesty showed up in serene temper, accepting O'Vane's formal military salute with a flourish of his riding stick, and set off at a brisk pace across the Pont Alexandre. The woolly feist pattered ahead of him on its silver chain and Count Senosky walked beside him. O'Vane fell into what he judged must be his post, some six paces directly in rear of King Peter. A sense of his proud new responsibilities came over him and he stiffened into his most imposing martial posture as he trailed behind, ready to defend the royal person with his life.

He very shortly was brought to a further sense of his new dignity by the passing of a group of French soldiers. For a moment he did not catch its significance when they drew themselves up to salute in approaching. Then he remembered his new Sam Browne with its gold buckles and flicked a careless toss of the hand back at them after the manner of proud officers. It was the first time he had been saluted and the thrill of it followed him for several squares.

But Senosky's shoes were not to be put out of mind in the careless way O'Vane had dismissed them at the d'Orsay. Block after block of hiking at a pace just short of regulation gait began to test his stamina as not even the most harrowing machine gun assault had tried him. The fear suddenly rose in his mind that his feet might fail him if Peter should walk on for many kilometers.

"A day o' this an' they'll be amputatin' me feet," he groaned aloud.

The glittering oasis of a French shoe store came into the desert of his anguish as the royal group swung to the left down the Champs Elysées. An array of shoes of all sizes tempted him to drop away from his post for a moment. But to slip away and leave the royal rear unprotected pricked his conscience as much the same sort of breach as dropping out of a troop column while on the march.

THE temptation persisted. His Majesty and Count Senosky were talking earnestly. Not once had they looked back since leaving the Grand Palais d'Orsay. It seemed safe enough to risk a hurried absence. The prize of release from his excruciating torture proving too great he bolted into the store.

"Quick wid youse!" he shouted in a vain effort to stir the laconic French salesman into something of his own excited haste. "Save me life wid a pair o' man's size tan shoes—number 'levens!"

The salesman, with Bozo's dumbness, merely shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows lazily by way of indicating that he did not understand a word. In desperation, O'Vane rushed to the window, picked out a pair of shiny dark tans that looked nearly big enough for his feet and shoved them across the counter at the Frenchman with the twelve silver francs that made up the whole of his remaining fortune.

With an outbreak of strange jargon that was eloquent of disapproval, the salesman dropped the shoes behind the counter, pushed the O'Vane fortune back to him and extended his ten fingers rapidly four times —forty francs. He shrugged his shoulders contemptuously when O'Vane pushed the francs back toward him. The price was not debatable.

O'Vane rushed from the store with mingled groans and curses. The oasis had proved to be a mirage. The effort of running on his swollen feet, as he was forced to do in order to overtake King Peter, visited full retribution upon him for his sin of quitting his post of duty. One moment's fleeting comfort came at finding that his French leave had not been detected. Peter had not looked back. This brought a new thought into O'Vane's tortured mind. He might with safety take off those soul destroying shoes and carry them for a time. He stooped over and began plucking feverishly at the laces only to meet failure again. A sharp command in French brought him erect.

"Attencion!"

O'Vane found himself looking into the solemn faces of a group of passing French officers. The senior among them had recognized the insignia of high rank on the shoulders of the distinguished foreigner and had called his comrades thus abruptly to respectful and formal attention. They brought their hands smartly to their cap visors and marched by him.

It was a bucket of cold water upon O'Vane's low intentions, bringing him back abruptly to a sense of his high station. He returned the salute in his best manner, rallied the shattered remnants of his moral forces and stuck manfully at his duty in full uniform, with something of the heroic stoicism of a soldier carrying bad wounds in the face of battle responsibility.

A less determined and courageous man must have dropped out long before His Majesty King Peter III finally brought up before the Lac Inférieur in the Bois de Boulogne. O'Vane swore that they had covered ten kilometers, Peter seeming to have a hobby for hiking.

"DEAH fellah, I trust I have not exhausted you," smiled his Majesty, evidently moved by the haunted look in O'Vane's red old face.

"Sure, yer Majesty," O'Vane managed

to reply, forcing a smile to his face, "walkin's me favorite fun, sir. Youse could never tire me at hikin'."

"Really quite sorry we cawnt continue onward," said King Peter regretfully. "Fact really is, y'know, we must have dinner at the Crillon at—ah—six o'clock and we must be picked up by my car presently."

O'Vane's smile was genuine and expansive now. Happier words he had never heard than these which brought surcease to pain and hunger and solved the terrible problem of the return.

A magnificent automobile halted at this moment in front of them. O'Vane caught a glimpse of a young woman of flashing beauty smiling gaily at King Peter from the luxurious setting of velvet and furs of the tonneau's interior. The chauffeur leaped from his seat, snapped open the door and stood at salute while his Majesty stepped into the car beside the fair charmer.

O'Vane was swept by a moment's confusion. Should he follow the king or take his place beside the driver? He turned to observe what Senosky did but the count was disappearing unconcernedly on foot. King Peter promptly relieved him of his doubts.

"Deah fellah," said his Majesty handing O'Vane the end of the silver dog chain, "do be so careful of Zbainski. Really a great—ah—compliment, y'know, that I should trust deah Zbainski to your care. He's a great walker—but have him at the hotel by seven so Bozo may give him his dinner.

The door closed upon the king, the driver leaped to his seat and the car purred swiftly away through the park. O'Vane found himself standing in Count Senosky's excruciating shoes in the midst of the Bois de Boulogne some five kilometers from the haven of the Grand Palais d'Orsay, hungry and alone, custodian of the woolly poodle at the end of the silver chain.

VI

FORCING back a wild impulse to kick the king's poodle into the street, strip the king's epaulettes from his back and make for the first train back to Tonnaire, O'Vane limped wretchedly to a park bench and dropped on to it.

"Steddy, me lad," he cautioned himself, as he relieved his feet of Senosky's villainous shoes, "youse mustn't loose yer head over nothin'. Remember the eight hundred kroner per—an' it'll soon be payday. Remember youse is a gen'ral, O'Vane—a gen'ral in his Majesty's army—and youse can't kick the rainbow over 'cause they's a fly on it."

He rubbed life back into his swollen feet and groaned again at thought of the long hike back to the hotel in those shoes, an ordeal he must not delay if he were to obey the king's order to have Zbainski back at the d'Orsay by seven o'clock. A happy thought flashed into his mind of slitting the soles of Senosky's shoes; and after cutting away a third of the bottom of each shoe he found that their vice-like grip was less deadly.

"For'ard wid yer misery," he commanded aloud. "Youse 'll have yer bearin's in a few days, O'Vane. In the meantime youse mustn't flirt wid the chance o' loosin' a king's favor. Grin an' bear it, me lad, fer it'll only be a few days till youse is safe in the palace and then youse can have things yer own way."

He made his way heavily, but with dignified erectness, through the Bois de Boulogne to the Champs Elysées. Rain had set in, soaking his feet from the seeping of water through the caverns in his soles; and misery was gripping him heavily again when his heart was set a pounding by the sight of an approaching group of American doughboys crossing from the Arc de Triomphe. As they came toward him under a cluster of street lights, he was able to make out a corporal and five privates whose easy gait proclaimed the fact that they were in Paris on military leave to see the sights.

O'Vane drew himself to added magnificence of dignity in anticipation of their salute to a foreign general. Wouldn't they drop in their tracks of surprise could they only know that the distinguished officer they were about to honor was, himself, one of them only a few days ago!

"Undisciplined rookies," he mumbled disgustedly, half aloud, when they ignored his epaulettes and Sam Browne. And there was the taunt of insolence in their faces as they passed him by, staring openly. An exclamation of mocking mirth brought O'Vane upon them hotly.

"SAY, youse birds," he demanded, "do youse know an officer when youse sees one!"

The group halted and stood staring at him. The corporal, a trim youth of the college boy type, spoke.

"Why yes—did monsieur want us to identify one for him?" he inquired innocently.

"Youse is in the presence of a officer—a general dee brigade—an' youse better snap into a salute," O'Vane roared, giving full vent to his outraged feelings.

The corporal brought himself to attention and saluted.

"My mistake, sir," he responded in the same collected voice, which was strangely vibrant, however, with some unpleasant quality. "Accept my most humble apology, your Highness. In my deep ignorance I mistook you and that monkey of yours for part of some transient menagerie—a thousand pardons, your Highness."

There was an insulting chorus of unrestrained guffaws as the suave corporal saluted again by extending his fingers in front of his face before he turned and walked away with his comrades. This was a fighting cause in O'Vane's old code. He took several steps after them intent on battle even against such odds before he regained control of himself in the thought that he must not risk Zbainski. Burning with wrath and humiliation he reluctantly forced himself back in the direction of the d'Orsay.

"Steddy, me lad," he cautioned himself again. "Youse can't risk loosing Zbainski. Eat their insults an' grin."

Bozo seized the silver chain avidly when O'Vane appeared at the royal suite a few minutes after seven o'clock. Patting Zbainski affectionately as if in sympathy that the poodle had been brought in late for his evening meal, Bozo hurriedly uncovered a silver platter and set it on the floor beside him. The woolly feist fell greedily upon the bowl of bread, milk and sliced meat that were his portion.

"What youse mean, you bonehead, feedin' that cur wid me a starvin' by inches!" O'Vane snarled at the servant.

Bozo's blank face dipped toward his knees, but O'Vane was not to be bowed out of his ravenous hunger. He pointed at his open mouth, then at the dog's supper and shoved Bozo toward the door. The servant paused at the threshold to bow, a look of understanding faintly lighting up his frozen face. He came bustling back in a few moments with another platter laden with bread, milk and slices of cooked meat. Before the horror-stricken O'Vane could interfere the dumb Bozo set it on the floor in front of the poodle. Zbainski dived into it.

As O'Vane, at the end of all patience, was holding the quaking Bozo by the nape of the neck while he gesticulated a frantic sign message for food for himself, Count Senosky entered abruptly.

"What means zis?" he asked severely.

"Sure an' I'm trying to get it through his thick head that I'm starvin' to death," O'Vane explained, releasing the startled Bozo with reluctance.

"Ze valet he do not understan' ze English, so it is impossible," said Senosky.

"Then youse'll have to tell 'im to feed me, Count—I means yer Highness. Sure an' I've got to have me eats."

"Monsieur forgeet my dignity," Senosky complained sharply. "I am not ze valet to arrange for your eats, as you call it."

Count Senosky shrugged his shoulders disdainfully and handed O'Vane a telegram with a curt, "Monsieur will read zis!"

The wire was from O'Vane's regimental commander, Colonel Havilan, addressed from Tonnaire to "His Highness, Lt. General Count Senosky, Master of the Household to His Royal Majesty King Peter III." O'Vane felt a thrill of pride as he recognized his colonel at his best in the message. He read:

> His Royal Majesty's most gracious willingness to honor my regiment with his illustrious presence overwhelms me with pride comma and I hasten to beseech that you command me the hour that best suits His Majesty's pleasure period May I hope for the valued privilege of parading my regiment in his Majesty's Honor query Please accept the assurance of my most profound respect.
>
> Havilan, Colonel, Inf., Comdg.

"Hees Majesty" Count Senosky announced impressively, "shall desire zat he leave on ze train at nine of ze morning. You will prepaire. *Bon soir, monsieur.*"

VII

EARLY in the afternoon of the next day, O'Vane followed his Royal Majesty from the de luxe train at Bar-sur-Aube on legs that shook perceptibly. His earlier enthusiasm for this visitation had been replaced by a dark foreboding and the ague in his legs shook the gold tassels of his epaulettes as he saw the lieutenant colonel and several staff officers of his regiment coming forward to receive the king.

Fortune smiled on him, however, and steadied his legs as the officers came up so flustered in the presence of royalty that they seemed to see the royal party only through a daze of their own excitement. Once on the long auto trip from Bar-sur-Aube to Tonnaire he felt the eyes of the regimental supply officer hard upon him in a puzzled way, as if something in his appearance awakened strange memories. But the supply officer must have been staring merely at the gaily plumed helmet that covered the distinguished foreign general's head and shaded his face. For he said nothing and presently turned his eyes.

"Ah, magnificent—really!" exclaimed King Peter as the military car dipped into a valley near Tonnaire.

Below them was the regiment, drawn up to receive the king. A magnificent sight, indeed, and one to arouse a king as the massed battalions, fixed bayonets flashing in the sun over full packs, steel helmets and bronzed faces, snapped as one man to attention.

THE royal car brought up fifty meters in front of the colonel, who sat a splendid bay charger borrowed for the occasion from a neighboring artillery picket line. Colonel Havilan brought his men to the rifle salute and sat majestically at the hand salute while the field music trilled its flourishes and the drums rolled off the ruffles for an emperor.

His Majesty having waived the "ride-around," Colonel Havilan broke his battalions into platoons for the parade and took his place at the king's right without so much as a look at his Majesty's staff.

Not even the uneasiness caused by the colonel's proximity damped the rising O'Vane ardor as his old regiment swept proudly by, every man a part of the perfect olive-drabbed fighting machine that so lately had done its full part in driving another emperor into black exile.

As old F Company came to the reviewing point O'Vane laughed inwardly as he took it upon himself to answer his captain's salute. He nearly bubbled aloud at the spectacle of that proud and haughty captain passing him with hand at rim of steel helmet. Then as he saw the solemn-faced youngsters of F Company's ranks with whom he had gone through the hell of the Argonne he found himself choking back an unaccountable sob while unbidden tears welled into his eyes. Never, he vowed fervently, had he seen anything so wonderful; and his wet eyes followed his old company wistfully into the distance. The passing of his regiment before him was not the gay lark he had pictured.

"Deah Colonel, accept my most hearty—ah—felicitations," exclaimed King Peter enthusiastically as Colonel Havilan turned to salute his royal guest with the passing of the rear of his regiment. "Really, y'know, I have never seen a finer command."

"It is a great honor that your Royal Majesty is pleased?" replied Colonel Havilan, flushed with happy excitement. "If your Majesty will honor our poor mess with his royal presence, we shall endeavor to make up out of our gratitude what we lack in the way of proper reception for your Majesty here in the field."

Colonel Havilan, with this fine speech which he had written out and memorized the night before, saluted the king and each of his generals in turn and gave brief instructions that they be taken at once to regimental headquarters where the royal party would be received before mess.

O'VANE felt that he had passed his second crisis when the colonel did not recognize him in saluting. How well that glittering uniform and overshadowing helmet concealed his identity was revealed a few minutes later when Colonel Havilan stepped up to him and looked him in the face without the slightest shadow of suspicion.

"I am Colonel Havilan," he announced. "I have not had the honor of being presented to you, sir."

O'Vane blanched as the Colonel extended his hand. Then he lost himself in the mighty presence of his regimental commander. Instead of taking the proffered hand with a discreet and silent bow as he had carefully planned that he should do, he now snapped involuntarily and in spite of himself into the ridiculously exaggerated and rigid salute that always marked his approach to high authority.

Colonel Havilan started violently. His hand and jaw dropped in unison as he stood staring at the unbelievable spectacle of a foreign general in full dress, aide to a king, frozen fearfully at salute before him.

"O'Vane!" he gasped.

The colonel suddenly remembered to toss his fingers in return of the salute and thus release the grotesque pose of the statue in front of him before others in the room should sense the tragedy at their elbows. Then he turned away abruptly to collect his wits.

It did not take Colonel Havilan long to make a decision. This was not a situation that could be temporized with. He must know the secret of this astounding enigma immediately. Giving his second-in-command whispered instructions for keeping his Majesty at ease for a few minutes, he bade O'Vane follow him to his quarters.

"What's the meaning of this outrage—what sort of—where—!" roared the colonel, his words seething.

"Sure, yer Majesty an' I'm a —" O'Vane began to stammer miserably.

"Stop it—don't try to 'your Majesty' me—my name is 'sir' and I'll not have you trying any of your fine bunk on me!" broke in Colonel Havilan. "Where'd you get that parrot skin uniform you're wearing!"

"Sir an' I been made a officer, sir—a general dee brigade in his Majesty's army, sir."

"General—hell!" snapped the colonel. "You talk like you'd just got out of a lunatic asylum. Remember you are a private in the United States Army."

"A private, sir?" gasped O'Vane, almost in tears. "Youse means the Colonel broke me back into the ranks fer bein' late?"

"I mean that I broke you for being A.W.O.L.—and what's more I'm going to try you for it—and what's still more I'm going to see that my special court adds something onto your sentence for every day you overstayed in Paris. I'll teach you to betray my confidence!"

"But, sir," pleaded O'Vane, almost in tears, "sure an' youse wouldn't want me to get a friendly king sore at our reg'ment, would youse, sir?"

"What's a friendly king got to do with one of my non-commissioned officers disgracing me by going A. W. O. L.!" the colonel charged him blankly.

"Sure, an' it was by the king's own orders, sir, that I reports to his Majesty."

"Just when did his Majesty take over the command of this regiment—tell me that. I have yet to see the order for my relief!"

"No sir, it wasn't that, sir. But his Majesty was lookin' fer protection, sir, an' when he commands me, sir, I thinks mebbe it was a honor fer our reg'ment sir, an' that the Colonel will approve."

"Listen!" thundered Colonel Havilan, pausing in his impatient pacing of the floor to point an accusing finger at O'Vane. "It is clear that you have imposed upon his Royal Majesty with that oily gift of gab of yours. But you can't fool me. Now what I want to know is—what is this all about? What are you doing in those parrot skins—why were you A. W. O. L.—why have you had the consummate gall to come here impersonating an officer!"

"But sir, I even refuses to speak wid the king at first, sir," protested O'Vane. "Sure an' I was runnin' fer me train when I saves the life o' his Majesty's dog—an' then his Majesty sent Count Senosky racin' after me to—"

"Answer my questions!" demanded the colonel. "If you are going to sit there and insult my intelligence I'll have to call the officer of the guard and have you put where you belong."

"Sir an' if the Colonel'll only let me tell in me own way, sure an' youse'll have it all," O'Vane moaned.

COLONEL HAVILAN seated himself ominously and listened in cynical silence, relieving his tension by tapping the top of his desk. Perhaps, he reflected, out of the maze of grotesque prevarication he could discern the truth and get some idea of what Private O'Vane was doing here with the royal party—a thing he must know before he reported back to his Majesty's presence.

O'Vane went over every detail unprompted and as he spoke the colonel's cynical attitude changed by slow degrees to one of absorbed interest, almost of belief. O'Vane laid great stress on the fact that the war was all over, the troops were going home and, while he knew it wasn't quite regular, he couldn't let go of this unheard of opportunity without losing it entirely. Colonel Havilan found himself remembering O'Vane's almost unequaled record in action and his own orders from G. H. Q. that the ferocious discipline of the war period should now be replaced by an era of reasonableness while the men were returning to their homes. O'Vane sensed the colonel's changing humor and pressed his advantage eloquently.

"A most unusual experience and quite

different from anything I had expected," commented Colonel Havilan slowly and calmly when O'Vane had finished his narrative. "But you should have had sense of responsibility enough to know that nothing would make amends for deserting your own service."

"But sir," O'Vane replied. "Doesn't I come back—an' what fer but to bring his Majesty here to decorate the best Colonel, sir, o' the best reg'ment in the Army, sir, wid the Cross o' King Peter. Do that sound like desertin', sir, when here I am wid the king—an' the king wid a medal in his Majesty's pocket for the Colonel."

Colonel Havilan's eyes flared with eager interest. Out of the showers of foreign decorations that had fallen upon the service not one single splotch of hero metal had fallen upon his willing breast, although he had hoped against hope that some fortunate circumstance or contact would favor him before his regiment finally sailed home.

"You mean that King Peter's government has awarded me the cross of his country?" he asked.

"Sir, it's what I brings his Majesty here fer. A cross fer youse an' a cross fer the cook o' headquarters comp'ny, sir."

"A cross for the cook of headquarters company?" demanded Colonel Havilan.

"Sir, and when I asks the king fer one fer the cook, his Majesty says O.K. when I tell's 'im the cook o' headquarters company makes the best hot cakes in the whole Army, sir."

"An inadequate cause," flared the coloonel. "I cannot allow the Cross of King Peter to be cheapened in such fashion. I'll not allow the cook of headquarters company to accept the decoration."

COLONEL HAVILAN arose to terminate the interview and return to his royal guest. He halted in front of the offending O'Vane to pass judgment upon him.

"Under all the exceptional circumstances," he announced, "I shall not try you before a special court. I will not restore you to your grade of sergeant, of course, and must confine you to regimental limits for sixty days. I consider that being very liberal with you. Now get back into your uniform, have the chevrons removed, and report back to F Company for duty in the ranks."

"But sir," O'Vane exclaimed, all but clutching at the colonel in desperation, "the colonel fergets me commission wid the king—sure the colonel won't lose me commission fer me as a general dee brigade what pays me eight hundred kroner?"

The colonel stood staring. O'Vane had not made it clear that his connection was permanent.

"You mean to say," he demanded, "that you have a real commission—that this isn't just a temporary masquerade concocted by imposing on his Majesty merely to help get you out of A. W. O. L. charges!"

"Sir, I holds his Majesty's perm'nent commission in his Majesty's army at eight hundred kroner per," O'Vane pleaded. "An if youse stans in me way now, sir, all I gets is a buck's pay 'til we muster out an' then only a dribblin' ninety bucks a month, sir, at me job o' policeman back home."

"Am I to understand you to say you are actually on the king's payroll with the full pay of a brigade general?"

"Sir, eight hundred kroner is me pay; sir, the full pay fer a general dee brigade—an' the first chance poor old O'Vane's ever had at a piece o' real money, sir."

"I can understand," reflected the colonel soberly, "that it would be very hard to lose such a sum, under the circumstances you narrate."

Colonel Havilan resumed his pacing of the floor, hands clasped behind his back, head thrown forward in deep thought, while he passed upon this unprecedented problem. It was some minutes until he stopped before O'Vane with his decision—minutes through which the gold tassels of the O'Vane epaulettes quivered under the wracking suspense.

"In view of your exceptional fighting record," the colonel announced, "and in further view of the fact that you are an unmitigated nuisance about a regiment in peace time, I have decided to recommend to proper authority that you be discharged in France to accept a remunerative position in Europe. It is necessary under existing orders that you show ample financial means to support yourself. You have this?"

"Sir, an' I'll have me eight hundred kroner on the end o' the month."

"There seems no question on that score and I'll so report. I must ask, however, that you keep out of sight until the king departs, when I will have you notified in time to step into his car. I want no one else to recognize you. You will remain in my quarters, therefore—and remember that in the event higher authority should happen to disapprove my request for your discharge you will be in honor bound to report back to your regiment immediately."

"Sir," O'Vane spoke up, resisting an impulse to embrace his colonel as the officer turned to go, "can I ask youse one favor, sir?"

"What is it now, O'Vane? Be certain you are reasonable in what you ask further of me or I may change my mind about the whole affair!"

"Sir, all I asks," O'Vane responded with an imploring note in his voice, "is that youse have the cook o' headquarters bring me in some food, sir, while youse is at dinner. Sir it's been a week, sir, since I had a square, sir, an' me stomach's hollow as a drum, sir. You see, sir—I been too busy wid me new duties to bother wid eatin'."

VIII

IT WAS a feverishly happy O'Vane that accompanied the royal party back to Paris on the late afternoon.

"Sure an' all me troubles clear up at once," he assured himself gleefully. "A real gen'ral now at eight hundred kroner per and me stomach full o' real food."

King Peter's limousine met them at the Gare du Nord and sped them to the Grand Palais d'Orsay, where King Peter found a delegation of dark-faced patriots awaiting his arrival. He graciously released O'Vane from duty for the day.

"Really a delightful day, deah fellah," he complimented the guardian of his royal person. "A really fine regiment, y' know—and so soon you shall see—ah—the household guards at parade."

O'Vane even paused to pat the royal poodle out of the fulness of his heart in this happy moment when his paradise shone in all its radiant hues with but a single dark splotch on the horizon—and that merely the few hours he must remain in Paris.

"An' I'm bettin' we gets out o' Paris fer the palace 'fore the week's gone if I ain't readin' signs wrong," he told himself as he settled into his luxurious bed and lay gazing contentedly at the heavy velvet canopy above.

A knock at the door was followed by the entrance of Count Senosky in person, who confirmed his thoughts miraculously.

"Hees Majesty," said the count in restrained excitement, "command zat I enform you zat hees Majesty depart in ze morning at ten of ze clock to take hees throne. You will be prepaire."

"We're really pullin' out o' this dump an' startin' fer God's country in the mornin'?" shouted O'Vane, leaping out of bed in his joy at the news.

"I come wiz the king's command," replied Count Senosky with offended dignity at this unseemly show of emotion, "and not for ze conversation. *Bon soir, monsieur.*"

HIS Majesty's return was a gala event on a scale of rare magnificence from the moment the international boundary was crossed. O'Vane found himself one of an increasing throng of glittering functionaries, civil and military, as the royal train, decked with the national colors, sped through fields and quaint villages toward the capital where King Peter would formally ascend his country's throne.

Except for the gnawing void that again had overtaken his neglected stomach, his hours were one of undiluted joy at being a part of the power and magnificence about him. His Majesty, now attired in a gorgeous military uniform littered with orders, had commanded that O'Vane be close at hand for service should any violence be attempted upon his royal person by some irresponsible agitator or lunatic.

"Really, y'know," his Majesty confided to O'Vane, "I cawnt altogether trust these—ah—fellahs that Zbainski sends to look after me. Might let some low rascal slip by to do me harm, y'know. There are so few I can trust until I—ah—get my bearings. I do so hope Zbainski will fawncy you, deah fellah."

"Sure, an' if he don't, we ain't takin' guff off no cock-eyed barber, yer Majesty," O'Vane rejoined fervently.

"Ah—but I must warn you," King Peter hastened to say, with a nervous twitch of his eyes, "we must be most careful, y'know, not to—ah—clash with Zbainski."

Salvos of saluting artillery, massed bands and cheering multitudes smothered the grind of the royal train as they drew into the depot at the capital. Flags, bunting, a sea of fluttering handkerchiefs and waving hats as far as the eye could reach along the crowded streets, were the setting of the fairyland that filled O'Vane's awe-stricken eyes. And his Majesty the center of all this demonstration—his Majesty, whose aide O'Vane now was.

There was no bustle or confusion as King Peter alighted. Crowd, and even celebrities of the receiving delegation, remained respectfully in their places until the royal party was off the train and formed ready to march across the depot grounds to proudly festooned vehicles. Then three men in high silk hats came slowly forward to greet his Majesty.

AT THE sight of the first one to approach O'Vane gasped sharply. One small eye of this dignitary looked straight to the front, the other glinted inward at a sharp angle.

"Zbainski," muttered O'Vane under his breath.

The premier's appearance perplexed him as he saw that Zbainski was undersized, thin, withered and bandy-legged. His frock coat and collar hung on him, accenting his sorry lean caricature of a body. But in spite of its disarranged eyes, Zbainski's face made up for the shortcomings of his figure. Its lines were straight and hard, the cheeks and jaws angular; and not even the high broad forehead showed a single undulating contour. The mouth was an abrupt slit that dropped violently at the ends. Even the close cropped hair and the thin white mustache bristled sharply.

"Sure an' I can say wid Count Senosky, that's a tough lookin' mug if I knows one when I sees it," O'Vane told himself with a shake of the head when he had taken in all the details of the terrible premier's makeup.

But the ill omen of the premier's appearance disappeared in the next moment when Zbainski approached King Peter. O'Vane chuckled at the transformation as Zbainski suddenly humbled himself with a series of low bows and an obsequious rubbing of his hands.

"Youse better knuckle down," O'Vane smiled to himself. "Sure an' his Majesty'll be havin' O'Vane lead youse around with the other dog 'fore the week's out."

Following the royal car in the front seat of the first vehicle of the column directly in rear of his Majesty, O'Vane mounted to something of the full dignity and magnificence of his new fairyland as the procession moved toward the royal palace. Riotous applause greeted not only King Peter but was passed on to the royal party, which was showered with tons of confetti and streamers of colored paper. O'Vane was quickly overcome by the joyous infection of unrestrained joy that ruled exultant multitudes and he abandoned his stern martial posture to wave back graciously at the cheering masses of common folk.

The palace itself was all that O'Vane had pictured for it in his fondest fancies. An imposing stone structure of some three stories, it was in a scrupulously groomed park amid graceful fountains and stately trees, shrubs and hedges, and shut off from the public by a steel picket barrier, pyramided to a height of thirty feet or more.

His enthusiasm rose above his empty stomach as the splendor of the royal palace that was to be his new home rose before him. Even now smoke was mounting airily from half a dozen brick chimneys with a cheery message of warm rooms and steaming viands. His past privations seemed as nothing now that he was entering the true paradise. Those days of misery back in Paris were gone forever. Henceforward luxury was his in the king's palace—and eight hundred kroner each month to spend as he pleased in finery and diversion. There would be plenty to spare, too, to carry him home on a rollicking visit one fine day.

O'Vane's chest swelled with new pride as the massive steel gates were swung shut by uniformed palace guards hard on the heels of the royal party. Only a half dozen cars were admitted while the crowd was left to gape and cheer from afar. This exclusiveness fed the sense of his own newly found importance. He saw, too, with a special satisfaction that the cock-eyed Zbainski rode humble in the second car behind him.

IX

AN HOUR later, while a sumptuous banquet was being made ready for the king's special guests, O'Vane came face to face with this Zbainski. He had been chuckling at the craven way the premier approached his Majesty in the great reception room. Zbainski came forward bowing at every step and rubbing his left hand with his right. Then, after addressing King Peter briefly, Zbainski's straight eye glued itself upon O'Vane.

O'Vane felt his hair bristle in resentment of the penetrating and unfriendly glare. He glared back in the same humor, secure in the knowledge of his Majesty's dislike of the base Zbainski. The premier, with a final disagreeable leer, turned to King Peter with a terse inquiry in the hopeless tongue O'Vane had heard all about him today.

"Deah fellah," his Majesty replied in English, mildly annoyed, "make such inquiry of him as you choose. I am not—ah—an interpreter, really. He speaks English after a fashion, y'know."

Zbainski turned the glare of his one straight eye back upon O'Vane.

"Vas you an Englisher!" he rasped, his accent betraying that he had not gleaned his smattering of English in Paris, as had Count Senosky, or from an English tutor, as had King Peter.

"Sure an' youse is insultin' a good American when youse asks that," replied O'Vane stoutly.

"Amerikaner!" Zbainski sneered. "Vell dot's against goot public policy for an Englisher or an Amerikaner to haf on dot uniform you got."

"The uniform o' his Majesty's service," retorted O'Vane hotly, drawing himself up to his full stature, "is good enough fer me. It's proud I am to be wearin' it."

Zbainski, his face livid with rage at this impertinence, turned to King Peter.

"Get rid mit him und get rid mit him quick!" he roared.

"Ah, but one moment Zbainski," protested King Peter weakly. "I'd say you are a bit abrupt, really. I have—"

"If dot is here ven der evening train is went, no longer vill I be responsible dot his health is safe," the premier foamed.

Zbainski stepped back and bowed profoundly to his Majesty. Then rubbing his hands in servility, he backed with a series of short low bows out of the presence of his royal master.

"YER Majesty," exploded O'Vane when Zbainski was gone from the room, "one word from youse an' I'll t'row him out o' the palace on his face, yer Majesty!"

"Really, y'know," responded King Peter laconically after a moment's irresolution, "I'm quite sorry Zbainski did not take a fawncy to you. A fellah of most violent likes and dislikes, this low rascal."

"Sure an' yer Majesty don't have to take guff like that off no cock-eyed barber!" O'Vane broke in, his voice trembling with passion. "Jes' say the word an'—"

"Really quite sorry Zbainski didn't fawncy you, deah fellow," his Majesty interrupted with sadness. "Cawnt have friction with the rascal, really. Senosky will—ah—reimburse you, you know. And the evening train to Paris is a most comfortable one—has compartments through to Paris, y'know. Bon voyage, deah fellah."

Count Senosky, seating himself at a great mahogany table in the center of the room as King Peter strolled unconcernedly out, busied himself with figures. In a few moments he opened a drawer, drew forth a packet of bank notes and counted out a small bundle. These he handed to the speechless and stupefied O'Vane, who stood in a dazed hope that he might suddenly awaken and find this sudden falling away of his gilded paradise a mere horrible nightmare.

Senosky's harsh voice brought him to the bitter reality of his sorry plight.

"Seexty-seven kroner," said Count Senosky. "His Majesty would desire zat I be most generous so I give you ze fractions. You have serve not one month but I pay for ze full month."

"Out wid me pay!" shouted O'Vane, his wits coming to him at the sight of this swindle. "Youse told me wid yer own mouth me pay was eight hundred kroner."

"Ah but ze eight hundred kroner is for ze year of service—not for ze month. Zat is what I tell you," Senosky replied blithely.

O'Vane steadied himself against the mahogany desk.

"How much is sixty-seven kroner in real money?" he asked hopelessly, suddenly realizing that Count Senosky must be quoting the true monthly pay rate.

"Ah, in ze Engleesh money zat would be —let me see—yes, four pound sterling, as ze Engleesh call it."

"Sure an' it's real American dollars I asks about."

"Zair are, as I remember," reflected Senosky, "nearly five of ze American dollar to one single pound. Monsieur can figure—four times ze five dollars."

O'Vane, in an irresistible outburst of passion, seized a heavy chair and sent it crashing across the room, then shook a menacing red fist under Count Senosky's nose.

"Sure an' I should a know'd they was a nigger in the woodpile wid sech as youse aroun'!" he roared. "An' it's a hell of a army youse runs in this low country what don't pay a general dee brigade as much as they pays a buck private in a reel army."

Count Senosky retained his perfect poise, responding to the outbreak with a mere annoyed raising of his eyebrows.

"*Bon soir, monsieur!*" he said coldly. "*Bon voyage à Paris.*"

X

AT THE debarkation port of Brest, where the ——th United States infantry would go aboard ship on the morrow for the joyous voyage home, Colonel Havilan, commanding, had paused in the final packing of his locker trunk to hang a gaudy bauble about his neck. It was the Cross of King Peter I awarded him for distinguished services to the Allied cause by no less a person than the illustrious King Peter III and placed about his neck in the first place by the royal hands in the awed presence of the regimental mess at Tonnaire.

The colonel was enjoying a final proud survey of himself in this bit of matchless envy-inspiring color preliminary to packing the medal away in his locker trunk when he was interrupted by a hesitant knock at the door of his private quarters. Quickly removing the decoration from about his neck and laying it carefully out of sight, Colonel Havilan seated himself at his desk, gravely busied himself with a pile of military papers and shouted "come in."

"O'Vane!" he exclaimed as the door opened.

The thought flashed into Colonel Havilan's mind that his one-time sergeant, now a high officer in King Peter's service, must have been dispatched on some royal mission. He rose to greet him cordially. But the man in the king's livery snapped into that outlandish frozen salute of his.

"Sir," the ornate visitor announced, "Private O'Vane reports fer duty wid the best reg'ment in the Army, sir."

An enemy air raid in peace time could hardly have disconcerted the colonel more. "What's the meaning of this—I—I thought you—why you—" he gasped, striving to bring his mind into focus. Private O'Vane had been duly discharged from the service a week before to accept "remunerative employment overseas."

"Sir, all I asks is to get back in me old outfit and out o' these peacock epa'lettes, sir," replied O'Vane sadly. "A United States uniform an' a pair o' Army shoes and some good American food 'll look like heaven to Private O'Vane, sir."

"But surely, man, you're out of your mind. You haven't been drinking too much, have you—and jeopardized your fine commission!"

Colonel Havilan was genuinely concerned. It had pleased him after a fashion that one of his fighting men had plucked picturesque high fortune out of the bountiful lap of war. O'Vane merely shook his head dolefully.

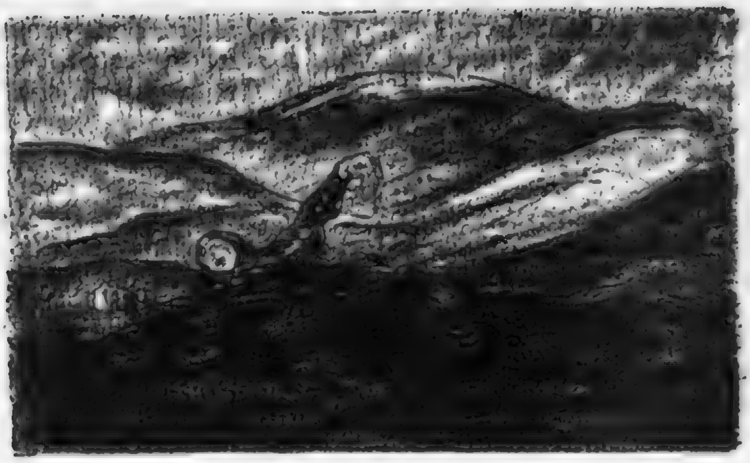
"Sure, sir, an' I did me best. I even acts as nursemaid fer the king's poodle, sir—an' I murders me poor feet an' me poor empty stomach, sir—an' I eats insults without complainin', sir—all fer less 'n half the pay of me old grade o' sergeant, sir, but when it comes to—"

"But eight hundred kroner, O'Vane—the pay of a general—surely you could afford to stand a few privations for such a sum as that! In a few years you could retire."

O'Vane groaned aloud. "Oh, sir, an' please don't say nothin' more 'bout it, sir. They was no way I could stayed widout t'rowin' the preemeer out o' the palace, sir—and the king he won't stan' fer that. They was no gettin' on wid that bird Zbainski."

"Why, you could have appealed to his Majesty direct," persisted Colonel Havilan with certainty. "It appeared to me that you were very strongly intrenched in the royal favor. I fear you have acted with rare indiscretion, O'Vane."

"Oh, sir," the forlorn O'Vane responded dejectedly, "this king bus'ness ain't what it musta been once. Sure an' all I wants now, sir, is a chanct to get back to me own country where we ain't got no kings—but even a poor policeeman don't take guff of no cockeyed barber, sir."



Stealing the Sparklers Seemed

Dead Easy

An Ingenious Story of a Robbery at Sea

By FRANK H. SHAW

PROFITING by experience, Collins decided to leave nothing to chance. He compelled himself to foresee every conceivable contingency. So far as getting the diamonds themselves was concerned, that was comparative child's play: novice's work; it was the keeping of them after they were got that presented the chief difficulty. Not the actual hiding of the gems—that presented no insurmountable difficulty; although a swagger liner doesn't offer many facilities for successful concealment of looted stuff—still, Collins wasn't worrying about that end of the business. There were hiding places, although most of them had already been worked to death. The calcium canister of a lifebuoy, for example—overdone. False bottoms in suitcases—obvious even to the mean intellect of a detective. Collins had small respect for the mentality of his natural enemies! Hollowed-out boot-trees—out-of-date about the time the Ark grounded on Ararat! But in his own mind he puzzled out at least half a dozen hiding holes, that hadn't been tried before, so far as his wide knowledge went; and what his knowledge didn't embrace wasn't worth thinking over, for Collins was a man of parts.

No; it was getting the sparklers off the ship that promised to be the real difficulty. The minute those mouth-watering Callifer diamonds were missed every thing aboard the *Perseus* would be gone through with a fine-tooth comb. They'd even sift the clinker from the funnels in their ardour, Collins thought bitterly. All the same, he had an idea; and in view of everything, Collins made his preliminary preparations with meticulous exactitude. Nothing whatever was to be left to chance; for this promised to be a haul that would set two continents by the ears—a chef-d'œuvre of looting, no less. It was the sort of thing that would cause a few envious teeth to grind, Collins thought with some complacency; and it would stamp him as what he was: the cleverest crook north of the equator.

"THERE'S no shadow of need to let too many folks in on this scheme," he informed the captain of the *Lockyer*, in the deck-cabin of that enterprising freighter, which by excellent chance was berthed in the next dock to the *Perseus*. "Just myself and you and—well, yes, I suppose Bonner. Can't do without him; he'll have to be put wise; but a thousand'll keep his mouth nicely shut; I reckon. You'll get your ten thousand, of course; and that's not too bad pay for five minutes' work, without any risk at all."

"Boy, I'm making no complaints," Captain Weyland observed. "Don't forget, though, that it calls for more'n a bit of dashed good workmanship to run things as fine as you want 'em run. And if anything should happen to go wrong, I'd be in it, too—accessory after the act, don't they call it? You don't seem to fancy there's anything to navigation that a high school kid couldn't do; but I rise to remark that it's a high art; and a mistake of a single second here may mean a dozen miles not so long after. And there's the timing, too—we're working to a mighty close schedule."

Weyland was far from averse from earning an honest—even a not altogether honest—ten thousand dollars. Until the *Lockyer* was put on the New York-London run, there'd been opportunities of trebling her master's pay without making any sort of song and dance about it: trading down to South American republics, with high import duties and lax collectors simply invited a man to easy smuggling. Rifles and ammunition for intending revolutionaries were the most profitable form of contraband, of course, but even when the war-minded Latins were most peacefully disposed, ordinary trade-stuffs, passed ashore without payments of imposts, helped to feed supplies into the coffers which an extravagant wife at home steadily and remorselessly drained. Not that he begrudged Belle her spendings—she was envied by her neighbors, and that pleased Captain Weyland's vanity. But lately, with this shift to the Atlantic Ocean run, those little extras that mean so much to a hard-working and God-fearing man had been difficult to come by: for ordinary commissions such as a man exacted by ancient custom from coal agents and stevedores and victuallers and the like were merely a drop in the gaping bucket of expenditure. Yes, ten thousand cold iron men would help a lot. And the scheme, as already outlined, showed fool-proof on the face of it.

"AS WE'RE sailing tonight," Weyland advised, "we'd better have Bonner along and wise him up to facts as expected to transpire."

Collins agreed to this. The captain of the *Lockyer* rang his cabin bell, and when his steward appeared, he ordered him to invite the freighter's chief mate along to the cabin. Through a well-made artificial beard Collins smiled satisfiedly. That beard was expressive of his astonishing attention to minute detail. If the people of the *Lockyer*, steward and such-like, recognised him later on, they'd be inclined to talk. He was still smiling when Bonner, a weasel-faced man, appeared.

"There's a chance of earning an easy thousand bucks for you," Weyland began as soon as the door was shut and the drinks were mixed. "Are you game?"

"Short of murder—yes. What's the big idea?"

"Nothing startling—easy money. The whole thing's a snip. One of these fine mornings, just at daybreak, you'll have to watch on deck, of course—we might happen to pick up a bit of salvage from the cruel, pitiless sea. Have an eyeful of this North Atlantic track-chart, Mister Mate: you ought to know it by this time as well as you know the way to your mouth. You and I've had to do a few bits of pretty close navigation, one way and another, since we've been shipmates, eh, Bonner? We've picked up a can-buoy two hundred miles from land before this, haven't we? Well, this is bubbly wine and Colorado Claros for us two. The *Perseus* will sail three days from now. Midnight on the thirteenth we'll be there, or thereabouts." He pricked the chart with the point of the dividers he had collected. "Midnight on the thirteenth, the *Perseus*, being the pride of the Western Ocean, will be there." He made another infinitesimal puncture in the chart. "Day breaks at five o'clock to the tick on the fourteenth. We steam an even ten knots per hour, timed to the revolution, as we can time it, and those two pin-pricks are exactly fifty miles apart. Get me? But I'm saying no more, boy, until I've got the old oath from your virgin lips."

BONNER, sniffing potential reward—and he would have sold the rags of his soul for one-half of what was offering—repeated the pledge without a second's hesitation. It was a fairly binding obligation one way and another; by it he pledged himself to keep secrets, betray his associates under no consideration whatsoever, not even of physical torture, and remain as loyal as blade to hilt throughout the projected undertaking, under pain of awe-inspiring penalties. And Weyland knew, by past proof, that, the oath being taken, Bonner would adhere to it in spirit as well as in letter; for he was no cheap piker, and played a square game according to his lights.

"So that," the skipper of the *Lockyer* continued, what time Bonner refreshed himself with a long swig from his generous tumbler, "if anything by any chance happened to fall overboard from the *Perseus*, at midnight on the thirteenth, we might, just at first flush o' dawn, happen across a bit of bright and promising salvage—always supposing we steered the same course as the *Perseus* did, eh?"

Bonner licked his lips and winked. "Depends on what it was that fell overboard, o' course," he mentioned. "If it was something floatable, yes; always providing our navigation was right to a hair."

"This *is* something floatable. Something human—this very gentleman who's offering you the thousand men, in a word. He's willing to pay you one thousand dollars in honest U. S. currency—one thousand, mark you—a good round number, eh, for keeping a good lookout at dawn on the morning of the fourteenth. It's the easiest money I've ever heard of."

"Can do, sir—barring fogs."

"I doubt if there'll be any; the weather's settled fine. No, no; I'm open to bet what bit of a payday's due to me that there'll be no smear of fog this passage across. Don't let anyone else in on this, Bonner; it mustn't look anything else but perfectly natural when it happens—sort of act o' God idea, you savvy?"

The chief mate nodded, grinned and winked at Collins, looked longingly at the whiskey-bottle until another shot was decanted for him, drank it with a nice appreciation of its flavor. Then he bent over the track-chart, telling himself that this would be the easiest thousand dollars he'd ever earned; and welcome money as well. He said something similar when he left the captain's cabin and returned to his duty about the littered freighter's decks."

"So that's all right," Weyland stated, when he and Collins were alone. "I've got everything cut and dried to a fine hair. The *Perseus* will run as if she were on railroad tracks; but in case of anything happening out of the common, you'll send me a wireless, of course? You can manage that?"

Collins nodded. He even produced from his pocket a copy of a simple code, which he handed to Captain Weyland. Ostensibly any wireless message he despatched from the flier would be addressed to someone resident in Ireland. The Irish receiving station would be well within range at the time, but Weyland's wireless man would tap that message and record it, and Weyland would understand it was for him, acting accordingly. Collins had not the smallest doubt that he would be able to ingratiate himself with the liner's navigational staff to an extent that would wise him to any slight, unexpected deflections in the ordained course taken by the *Perseus*. It was these little touches, these meticulous attentions to trifling detail, that lifted him clean out of the ruck of ordinary crookdom, and stamped him as a genuine artist, a great master, indeed; but as this was to be the biggest coup he'd handled—his final coup, too, he fondly hoped—he was gilding the lily and leaving nothing whatsoever to chance. The Callifer diamonds were worth at least a million of the best; probably more if judiciously disposed of, and Collins flattered himself that he knew as much about marketing his earnings as he knew about winning them.

WITH the track chart under their noses, the two men rehearsed every infinitesimal detail of the scheme. They wanted to be letter-perfect, so that the entire transaction would work with the noiseless certainty of a flawless masterpiece of mechanical engineering. And when Collins made his farewell and got himself ashore amongst the raucous-voiced dock workers and the shunting cars, he was confident then his plan was as sound as a bell of brass. He bade the mailman, who was approaching the *Lockyer's* gangway, a cordial good day. He offered a cigar to the custom house searcher at the dock gate, and chatted casually with him for a while, telling a few of the sultry stories for which he was notorious. Later, from the deck of a ferry boat, he watched the *Lockyer*, aided by busy tugs, work her way out into the river and turn her squat bow toward the statue of Liberty and the open water beyond. Mentally he rubbed his hands, as well as physically. It was, analyse it as you might, a fine idea. To be sure it meant a few hours' discomfort, but there need be practically no suggestion of risk. As near as human forethought could make it, the scheme was certain—a dead liner. He was aware of a pleasant tingling; a complacent satisfaction in the excellence of his own workmanship. A bit of discomfort, a risk that was absolutely negligible; these are worth chancing when the full of a million dollars' worth of diamonds stood as tangible reward for the exertion. Oh, the thing was easy; hardly worth the attention of such a brain as his, indeed, if it were not for the magnitude of the reward. He flattered himself with pleasing visions of future opulence. When everything was neatly and successfully done, the sparklers disposed of in the best market—why, a man could sit up and take a breath—he could rest on his oars for the remainder of his life; find and marry some decent little girl, keep a couple of cars, say; burst into society, if ambitions ran that way; and any further crook-stuff would be more in the nature of a hobby than a profession. It would be no end of a lark to turn dilettante, he reflected, and go into the magnetic old game just for the sheer love and lust of the thing, not bothering about makings, but just outwitting his life-long enemies, the police: showing them what a pack of bone-headed hicks they really were when it came to tackling a man of his full-size caliber.

And he still thought how remarkably easy it all promised to be as he landed from the ferry, and went to his inconspicuous room in 72nd Street.

So did Captain Weyland think it would be easy, as he ran through the bundle of mail handed aboard the *Lockyer* by that mail-carrier whom Collins had greeted as he tripped airily ashore. There was a letter from Mrs. Weyland, in which she complained of pressing creditors, unpaid bills, lack of ameliorations to the hard lot of a seaman's wife. Try as she might, she deplored, she could not make both ends meet on her husband's monthly allotment of pay.

"That'll be all right," Weyland muttered. "You wait until I get home this time, Mrs. Weyland, my lass!" Apart from a few business letters the rest of the mail was for the ship's general company: two of them, addressed in the same handwriting, were for the third engineer.

"Mrs. Macintosh is a better correspondent than my old woman," Weyland thought, as he handed the bundle to the steward for distribution. "I wonder if she's always screaming for money—money; the same way Mrs. W. does! Never mind, Belle my dear; you won't have any more complaints this time; and if you're a good little girl, I'll maybe get you that mink coat this winter." He chuckled, rubbed his hands satisfiedly; and the pilot who took the freighter out to Sandy Hook decided that there were worse men in the seafaring trade than Captain Weyland, of the *Lockyer*.

COLLINS, lacking his beard, made no attempt to hide himself under a bushel aboard the *Perseus*. He wasn't known on the Atlantic Ferry, not even by the card playing gangs who counted the fast liners their happiest hunting-grounds. That had always been Collin's forte: to keep himself severely to himself, and never to associate himself with any recognised gang. To be one of a party meant a considerable lessening of profits and a vast increase in risk. You simply made a free gift of two-thirds of your brain-power to a crowd who'd hand you the lowdown without an instant's hesitation if it meant the salvation of their own worthless hides. No, the single-handed game for Collins every time.

But, though himself unknown, he was familiar with the appearance of most of the underworld specialists who frequented the Big Ferry; knew their reputations, too; and by the time the liner was twenty-four hours out from Sandy Hook, he had satisfied himself that none of the big men were aboard beyond himself—the biggest of the lot. The others were scared to tackle a problem of this magnitude, he believed. They were up against the old, dull proposition of getting clear away with the loot when once it was taken. That was always the heaviest part of a specialist's work, the actual pinching was easy, dead easy. But he wasn't scared.

So, fearing no rivals, he gave himself up to peaceful enjoyment of what promised to be a more than averagely enjoyable trip—so long as it lasted. As a saloon passenger occupying a handsome berth, for which he'd paid heavily, he possessed the run of the ship; he made himself equally at home in the smoking-lounge as in the officers' mess, although that sanctuary was,

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by ship-law, forbidden territory to the mere fare-paying passenger. To the second and nagivating officer he casually mentioned, between two quaint and rib-cracking stories, that his cousin was a director of the line owning the *Perseus*. The second mate was ambitious to marry a girl who was considerably above his head so far as social position was concerned; and, scenting possibilities of promotion, he gave Collins, who did not figure on the passenger list as Collins, at all, but as Mainwaring, the free run of his own cabin, where his navigation-books were stowed. Collins always contrived to drift into that cabin when the second mate was working up the noon sights and discovering the ship's position on the face of the vasty deep; and he always showed a passenger's curiosity regarding the daily distance run. Navigation, he explained, was a science that had always fascinated him; and it was the outstanding regret of his life that his parents had not seen fit to embark him on a seafaring career.

"You can count yourself lucky they didn't," grunted the second. "It's a mug's game at best; nothing in it but misery and poverty and loneliness. Even in this line it isn't all beer and skittles."

AS HE looked at the framed portrait of a very pretty girl that was placed on his bulkhead, Collins gently hinted that it might be possible to speak a word in his favor in the place where such speaking would do the most good. But there was nothing boastful or patronising about his manner: always he was quiet and unostentatious, a well-bred man, who liked to do other people good turns if such lay within his power. From the purser he collected items of information regarding train services in England, and made a pleasing impression on that genial soul, who was a connoisseur of cigars, and who was pleased to approve of the occasional weeds Collins modestly offered for his delectation. As it happened it was the purser himself who made the first mention of the famous Callifer diamonds. He did it with a suggestion of pride, with a side-glance at the strong safe built into the side of his cabin. He did not know that Collins had led him to the subject with subtle craftiness.

"Oh, yes; I've heard of 'em," Collins said indifferently. "Who hasn't? But what have the Callifer diamonds to do with me—or with you, either, for the matter of that?"

"They're aboard this fine, large packet, my friend, that's all," beamed the purser, smiling genially through fragrant blue smoke. "They're very much aboard and so far as I'm concerned, I'll be darned glad when they're safely ashore again. Not that anything's likely to happen to 'em, so long as they're where they are; but it's the responsibility that tells—the responsibility, and no extra pay for the mental wear and tear, either!"

AS THE purser frequently stared at the safe-door, Collins assumed that the diamonds were housed in that strong receptacle, as he expected them to be. Mrs. Callifer was hardly the woman to leave a million's worth of sparklers lying haphazard about her opulent suite, which was known aboard the *Perseus* as the royal suite because it had been decorated and embellished for the honeymoon trip of a minor royalty and his bride. Mrs. Callifer, though belonging to the newly, vulgarly rich, was informed by shrewd, peasant-class common sense. It was her fund of common sense, indeed that had dragged Hiram K. Callifer from obscurity to eminence as possessor of the wife who possessed the Callifer diamonds; to say nothing of a twenty million dollar fortune, made from glue.

"But I expect Mrs. Callifer'll slip you a discreet cheque before she waddles ashore, though," said Collins indifferently. "Personally I've no liking for diamonds, they're too cold and unsympathetic for me. Give me pearls every time. If I ever marry at all, which isn't likely, it'll be a girl who'll carry off good pearls that'll be the future Mrs. Mainwaring. And when I find her she'll get all the pearls she can carry. Did you hear that yarn about the war widow and the bishop?"

The purser had not heard it. He enjoyed it until tears oozed out of his eyes and gently trickled down his fattish cheeks. It reminded him of another, which seemed to demand a drink. When Collins got up to go he was sincerely and cordially pressed to repeat his visit at his own convenience. But in the main he kept the deck during the hours of daylight. His was a genial nature. He was one of those men who inevitably take the lead aboard a liner—you find them in every ship; the men who undertake the amusement of the many; who organise the daily sweep on the ship's run, who break down the initial barriers that exist between a congregation of suspicious humanity thrown into close relation with one another during a week or more of voyaging, when outside entertainments are prohibited. The weather continuing gloriously fine and genial, he coaxed even the most reluctant to play deck games, and began to draw up a programme of sports and tournaments which even Mrs. Callifer approved of. So keen did this lady become over the innocent pastime of bull-board that she spent far more time on deck than she otherwise would have done. She coyly admitted that the exercise was beneficial to one suffering from a superabundance of avoirdupois, and was correspondingly grateful to Collins, who was always ready and willing to partner her in a game.

BUT Mrs. Callifer's growing fondness for the sudorific pastime gave him the opportunity he needed: to investigate her suite with the meticulous thoroughness of the expert. The diamonds, as he had all along suspected, were not there, ergo, they would be stowed away for security in the purser's safe. Not that it made much difference: he was prepared for every contingency. Men customarily came to grief in this, the most scientifically skilful calling in all the world through leaving odd trifles to chance. Not a single element of chance was permitted to enter into Collins's scheme. As a last resort he was prepared, if the need arose, to scuttle the *Perseus* in order to secure the gems, but such a need hardly appeared likely; it didn't come into the category of the probably. Already, thanks to clever eyes, he knew exactly where the purser kept his keys—furthermore, he knew which key fitted the safe, which was not at all an elaborate contrivance, though strong enough to withstand dynamite. He had gathered this information through asking Mr. Embleton to take charge of sundry rolls of money that he possessed; and he had been given every opportunity of watching the officer bestow the stuff in the stout repository.

The whole business, from a to z, was easy, dead-easy. Easy to the point of absurdity, in fact. Getting the diamonds was a cinch, and now that all his plans were worked out to the last infinitesimal hair, getting clear with the brighties was equally simple. There were times when Collins felt inclined to laugh at the sublime asininity of his fellow human beings. This game of his was hardly deserving of classification amongst the arts, by reason of its easiness. Nevertheless, he made no common mistake of underrating such difficulties as there were; he went on carefully and thoroughly with the programme he had so adroitly arranged. Just to set any possibly existent, lingering doubt at rest, he worked up enthusiasm aboard to the extent of organising a dance—a fancy-dress affair. This was on the evening of the twelfth of the month. And the ball was a success. Most of the costumes were ingenuous, some were dazzling, a few were daring. Mrs. Callifer was resplendent in massive satin and the Callifer diamonds, which, seen to advantage on her considerable person, elicited awed expressions of amazement from envious fellow passengers.

Collins, tastefully attired as Mephistopheles, danced with the diamonds, had them within fingering distance, satisfied himself that they were the real bona-fide thing; no paltry replicas here for sweet safety's sake. Then he danced with a girl on whom, he mentally decided, pearls would look well. No sentimentalist at the best of times, but merely a plain, matter-of-fact business man, with a flair for painstaking.

Collins wondered how Edith Wemyss would look when bedecked with the rose-pearls he would like to give her. She liked him: that was evident; she had a wealth of pleasing chatter for his ears; she was a looker—oh, yes, you couldn't make any mistake that way; she had the eyes and the lips and all the other composites that go to make up a pleasing dial. Straight as a line, too; she was a girl any man might be proud of; one a man would pridefully delight in guarding against the thorns and stones of life's perilous path. And he knew the very pearls that would suit her best! To secure them would mean a little prolongation of his present career; but the girl was worth it.

COLLINS, what time he talked commonplaces and smiled into Edith's generously smiling eyes, saw mental visions of her: pearl-bedight and radiant; then the Callifer diamonds swam into his immediate ken, and he concentrated on the present scheme, fighting down extraneous dalliance. You couldn't have it both ways, anyhow. If he wanted the girl he must foreswear the diamonds, and he'd spent quite a considerable time in preparing and boiling down the plans for those diamonds' annexation. Only a little reluctantly he banished Miss Wemyss from his thoughts, and was rather glad he had done so when he was witness to a very coarse snub administered to her by the egregious Mrs. Callifer. But the brief love dream was over and done with, merely a little unconsidered ripple on the calm sea of normal existence. Perhaps, he decided, later on, when he was on easy terms with existence, opulently established on Easy Street, when the need for eking out a precarious existence by dubious means was finally done with, perhaps then he might contemplate the sweets of a *ménage a deux*. Not yet, though. More than one good man—a slim worker, a crafty Jake—had come a mucker through thinking of a woman instead of his job; and it didn't matter if the woman was a square Jane, she interfered with life's schedule. You simply couldn't have it both ways; you couldn't mix love and business; and in life's battle sentiment must take a place in the remote rear. Either your work suffered or your heart; and Collins had his work to think about.

But when, toward the end of the party He found himself alone with Edith Wemyss, in a sheltered alcove that seemed designed by the shipbuilders for the very purpose, he simply could not restrain himself from helping himself to the pouting lips so temptingly and half reluctantly offered. Nothing more than a comradely kiss, though—he knew where to draw the line. She'd forget about it all by daylight—at all events, by the time the voyage was ended. But kissing mustn't interfere with business. Nevertheless as he meditated over the affair down in his cabin at the conclusion of the revel, he decided that he was glad he'd kissed Edith Wemyss. There were other things in life beside diamonds; and presently his time for sweet dalliance would come. Once let him get this bit of business satisfactorily consummated, and the lighter things of life should have attention. A man of thirty-eight ought to think of the future. Someone like Edith Wemyss would do; he liked that rich tawny red of her cunningly shingled hair; as he liked the deep violet of her eyes. She was a woman who could keep a secret—but if she had to come between him and the Callifer diamonds—Collins knew that if she did chance to come between he would strangle her without a second's hesitation. A man's heart must always be in subjugation to his mind! Especially a man who took his profession seriously with an eye to the artistic side of it.

THERE in his state-room he went over the intimate details of the plan. He took out the suitcase he had not as yet unpacked, unlocked it and took from it what was the principal item in his programme: a neat rubber suit, double, and fitted with a small tube and valve. He further discovered a small bicycle pump and with a few quick strokes of the plunger inflated the rubber suit. That was all right, then; he breathed a sigh of relief and restored suit and pump to the suitcase, which he locked and stowed away in its old resting place. That inflated suit would keep him comfortably afloat for many hours—five at least, until the plodding *Lockyer* discovered him afloat in the clear glory of the dawn of the fourteenth. He rubbed his neat and capable hands together and smiled.

"Easy isn't the name for it," he snickered. "But it's clever; oh, yes, devilish clever!" It was the simple cleverness of the idea that appealed to his artistry. The big things were generally simple, when you came to think of it. The way he'd schemed it out there wasn't the earthly chance of a mistake; and, with the luck that attends the daring, the weather—the one factor that couldn't be ruled by carefulness, had kept fine and was even improving. Not a sign of its worsening anywhere—the second mate said it was flying-fish weather and likely to continue clear across the pond.

"So that it's narrowed down to what's mighty little better than a pickpocket's job," Collins mused, unlacing his dancing shoes. He hugged a knee and leaned back on his bunk, to enjoy the laugh to the full. "But it isn't every pickpocket could get away with 'em safely. Where's the man who can? He's here—here in Room Number 127, turbine steamer *Perseus!* And it all comes of taking your calling seriously and elevating it until it's a fine art, an exact science! Good luck to you, Charlie Collins;

you're amongst the kings of your trade—may you live long and die happy!"

He finished undressing and turned into his bunk, to sleep like a little babe until the bedroom steward brought him his morning tea.

LAST night's dance being such a success, everyone aboard was glad when Collins suggested a repetition. Before dinner he spent a friendly half-hour with the second mate, and discovered from him—the officer had no idea how closely he was being cross-questioned—that there had been no deviations of any sort from the allotted course; the ship was keeping to time and track precisely as an express flier might be expected to do. Consequently there was no call for Charlie Collins to despatch any radio message to that fictitious Irish address; but it pleased him and flattered his vanity to think that in the event of necessity arising he had prepared for such an eventuality.

The dance was a very great success indeed; but this night Mrs. Callifer did not dazzle the eyes of her fellows by wearing the famous diamonds. She explained to Collins, when he danced with her, that she did not care to trouble the obliging purser, who hadn't been feeling very well all day, and who had, for a wonder—for he was an excellent trencherman normally—failed to put in an appearance at dinner. Remembering that excellent cigar which the purser had smoked with him after tea, Collins smiled inwardly: everything was working out in the strictest accordance with plan. He had not the smallest desire to rid the *Perseus* of an efficient servant so long as the work could be done without that drastic alternative, and the doped cigar would probably do the trick quite as efficiently as would a slung-shot.

No false sentiment would have permitted the earthly career of Ezekiel Embleton to stand for one moment in the way of the ultimate success! One didn't balk at trifles when big issues pended. But Edith Wemyss had said that she liked the purser, and if anything tragic occurred to him her wonderful eyes might grow moist, and there was nothing to be gained by inflicting gratuitous pain.

Collins danced every dance: three of them with Edith; but on this night he did not allow himself to kiss her. She had shown an open liking for his companionship during the day, and he really didn't want to grow too fond of her. As usual, dancing stopped at sharp eleven o'clock. The passengers, tired from a long day on deck and much exercise in the finals of the sports Collins had arranged, descended gladly to their cabins; all save the bridge fiends, who continued their game in the smoke-room defiant of regulations. The deck-lights were extinguished just as Collins bade Edith Wemyss a gay good-night at the head of the saloon companionway. He stated his immediate intention of turning in.

"I seem as if I'd been up for a week," he said, yawning heartily behind his hand. "It takes it out of a man to dry-nurse all this pack, what?"

"Sure thing," said Edith brightly. "This ship would be a difficult imitation of a mausoleum if it wasn't for you, Charlie Mainwaring. Bye-bye—sleep well!"

"She's surely an eyeful," Collins murmured, descending to his cabin. But he did not seek the comfort of his bunk.

HE SWIFTLY changed into thick warm clothing. He slung a capacious spirit flask about his neck, under his coat. It was stopperful of choice whisky. He consulted his two watches; one of them set to Greenwich time—another example of his meticulous attention to detail, and checked daily by the time signal. There was plenty of time yet.

He took out the inflatable suit and the pump, rolled them small, and with them under his coat, he slid out along the alleyway, reached the after-deck, and having previously familiarised himself with the detailed geography of the ship, stowed the bundle away in a corner of the after wheelhouse, under the wheel grating, where there was not one chance in a thousand of their being discovered. He vented a sigh of relief and contentment when this was done, and returned to his cabin. Here he possessed himself of various impedimenta that appealed to him as needful for a clever craftsman. His gleanings he stowed away in the various capacious pockets of the loose warm coat he wore. Then he left his cabin again and set off for the purser's room. There was really not the slightest need for that feverish haste which was so often the downfall of experts. He exchanged a cordial good-night with a night steward he passed, who expressed no astonishment at seeing his changed clothing. Collins had accustomed the people of the ship to his little ways; almost always, after lights were out, he donned fearnaught garb and indulged himself with an hour's strenuous pacing of the promenade deck where his rubber soled shoes made no sound likely to disturb sleeping passengers beneath.

HE KNOCKED at the purser's door, and, receiving a grumbled reply, turned the handle and entered. Only a small bedside lamp was burning in the apartment; and, holding the door in his hand, Collins said conversationally, and in a rather loud voice:

"Sorry to hear you were a bit off color, old chap. Thought I'd just happen along and ask how you're feeling now; but I won't stop."

Nevertheless, he closed the door with himself on the inside; and the glance he cast about the room was alert and comprehensive.

"You're right; I'm not feeling up to much," admitted Embleton lazily. "And for the life of me I can't think what's turned me up this way. It must have been something I had for lunch—the curried prawns, as like as not. They're good, but they're indigestible." The purser was a hearty trencherman, seldom missing any item on the menus.

"That's ever so much of a pity," sympathised Collins. "You seen the doctor, purser?"

"He was along an hour ago or thereabouts, and he dosed me with some filthy muck that would have sickened a rhinoceros, and said there wasn't anything really seriously wrong."

"Well, now, that's too bad—and I just can't tell you how sorry I am, old man. I hope you'll soon be better, purser. You don't look any too bright, I'd like to say. So I won't disturb you, because I'm open to bet a hat you'll be glad to be left alone to sleep it off. It looks to me as if a good shot of raw brandy would do you more good than all the dope the doctor has in his shop. I took the liberty of fetching a drop along when I heard you weren't feeling so bright."

He produced a smaller flask from a sidepocket, went to the bottle-rack over the washstand, secured a tumbler, and, carefully polishing it with a crisp, clean handkerchief, which he took from his sleeve, shook the flask so that it gurgled enticingly.

"You know—spite of what that washout sawbones said, I believe a drink'd do me all the good in the world," said Embleton. "Dashed decent of you to think of it, Mr. Mainwaring. I'm an abstemious man as a general thing; I've got to be with my responsibilities; but I reckon this could be called medicinal, eh?"

"I should say so. It's a drop of real good old brandy I've got here. I'll—"

Collins linked his little finger about the cup-top of the flask, still holding the tumbler; but the stopper was obdurate.

"Here: just hold this a second, the darned thing's stuck," he said, and turned his back to the bunk. "There—that's better," he said.

HE MOVED cat like as he slapped the saturated handkerchief over the purser's face and firmly held it in place. His free hand went round the officer's arms in a bear like hug; his muscles seemed a compound of whalebone and steel.

"You—dirty—hound!" gurgled Embleton, struggling, but impotently.

He was being dealt with by a craftsman; his gurgles subsided into deep, even breathing, alternated with choking gasps. His body slowly relaxed in Collin's arm, lay limp and inert, but the diamond coveter did not yet remove the handkerchief. He was far too old a bird to be caught with chaff. He held on, one hand pressing the handkerchief to the purser's face, one arm encircling him, until experience informed him that the chloroform had done its work. Then he breathed satisfiedly, reached for the flask, and trickled another thin stream of the anæsthetic on the fair linen and waited. There was no remonstrance from Mr. Embleton, who only breathed in a deeper, more satisfying fashion.

"Good enough!" Collins muttered, and now became a very lightning-flash of activity.

Everything had been planned out beforehand and rehearsed with meticulous efficiency—each evening after reaching his stateroom he had gone through the complex motions, training eye and hand. Another and bigger handkerchief bound the chloroformed linen firmly about the purser's face.

If the officer had struggled he would have done so for the last time. Easily within reach of Collin's hand was a short length of gas piping, capable of killing a man without leaving outside evidence. As it was, he hesitated, took out the gas pipe, studied, put it back with a headshake. There was no need to bring unnecessary tears to Edith Wemyss's eyes, and unnecessary killing wasn't artistic, anyhow—a sign of weakness. There was where so many failed to achieve greatness; they killed on impulse and earned hostility, no matter who their victim might be.

HE REPLACED the gas pipe with a hank of thin but extraordinarily tough fishing line. There was no need for cumbersome rope bonds, properly handled twine would do the trick just as effectively. He worked busily as any bee, and when he straightened himself the purser was as helpless as a three thousand year old mummy. Collins surveyed him with the appreciation of an artist before he turned him to face the bulkhead, and took from about his neck the bunch of keys that hung there on a stout silver chain. This done, he moved without haste to the door and silently locked it. He then returned to the purser's bunk, deftly unscrewed the disc of the push-bell, and broke the circuit. Nothing was to be left to chance, he assured himself. There was now practically no possibility of the purser summoning assistance; indeed, the odds were strongly against his being disturbed at all before seven o'clock; at which hour a steward customarily took him his morning tea.

Collins carefully drew the bedclothes up about the ears of the unconscious figure and administered a pat to the bulky shoulder. "You're as right as rain," he said; "and I know men who'd have scuppered you. Think yourself lucky, old lad." But he did not waste time on extraneous trifles. He easily selected the safe key; it seemed to leap to his fingers from the bunch. He slid that key into the lock and turned it; without sound the weighty door swung open. The large leather case containing the Callifer diamonds was within. Two spots of rich color tinged Collins's cheeks as he drew the case forth. It was the only evidence of excitement that he showed—otherwise he might have been a man of marble. Of course, the casket was locked, and the key, no doubt, rested under Mrs. Callifer's inviolate pillow—a double safeguard. But it was not at all necessary to trouble the estimable lady and subject her to any sort of rude handling, as in Embleton's case. A keen strong knife with a razor-edge laughed at the lock as surely as ever love laughed at lockmakers. Queer things people did! Collins reflected. They put so much faith in a lock, and never troubled themselves to think what was around the lock! He lifted the lid of the case and the diamonds sparkled enticingly under his eyes.

"NICEY, nicey!" he whispered, fondling them as if they were alive, as, indeed, they seemed alive. Yes, there the jewels all were: tiaras, necklaces, earrings, pendants, a massive stomacher, bracelets—enough diamonds of first water to caparison a war-horse! He stowed the gems in various convenient pockets, as if they were things of no worth, shut the case, replaced it in the safe, shut and locked the safe. Then he straightened himself, breathing evenly, and listening. There was no sound save the even throb of the *Perseus's* mighty engines, and the dull plash-plash of water as it rustled along her fragile, terrible strong sides. Collins permitted himself a satisfied grin at his reflection in the mirror. He walked to the bunk and looked down: Embleton still slept on profoundly, but another trickle of chloroform on the handkerchief would do no harm. This done, a quick inspection of the bonds followed.

No, there was nothing wrong there—everything was right in the smallest detail. Collins tossed the flask through the open port and sent the keys after it. That was a bit of a lark! They would certainly spend some time in opening the safe, in the key's absence, and until the strong-box was opened they wouldn't understand exactly what had happened. Not that Collins had contented himself with the diamonds alone. He had possessed himself of his own rolls of money, together with several other considerable rolls. All had gone into those capacious, unfillable pockets.

Soundlessly he turned the key in the lock, opened the door without an affectation of stealthiness, called out: "Well, good-night, old bird; hope you'll be better in the morning!" passed out, shut the door, and turned the key that he had dexterously removed from the inside. Lord! Wasn't it easy? There was even more time gained, too, because when the steward came in the morning and knocked and found the door locked, with no response to his summons elicited, he'd naturally think the purser had shut himself in in order not to be disturbed; and as likely as not he'd leave him alone for another hour or two. Easy!

Under one of the pilot lights, Collins studied the Greenwich-set watch; it still wanted ten minutes to twelve. Everything had gone with the sweet precision of clockwork; that was the advantage of being an artist at your trade. There was no need to spoil a single thing by hurrying. He went to his own cabin and gave it a once-over. He had assured himself beforehand that he was not leaving a single clue behind. He tasted no reluctance at parting with the personal baggage that was there. You didn't grudge a few clothes when you carried a million dollars' worth of diamonds about your person. He locked his cabin door from the outside, after turning out the lights, and removed the key. Then he went aft to the wheelhouse.

Exactly as eight bells sounded on the bridge, so neatly had he timed it, he completed his inflation of the rubber suit that he had donned over his warm clothing, screwed down the valve, climbed the taffrail, and dropped off into the frothing confusion of the *Perseus's* wake. Such small splashing as his descent made was overwhelmed by the roaring clamour of the boisterous water. He heard the ship's forecastle bell answer the chimes from the bridge as he went down into the void.

AND precisely as he dropped, Mr. Angus Macintosh, third engineer of the S. S. *Lockyer*, that unbeautiful freighter, descended to the ship's engine-room to assume charge of the middle watch. Mr. Macintosh prided himself on his zeal; he invariably gave an excellent relief to the fourth engineer, who had stood the first watch.

"She's runnin' as sweet as cream," said the fourth, who answered to the name of Grahame. "I've just been roond her; she's fine, mon, fine! She's throttled back a bit, ye'll ken, Misterr Macintosh, on account she's been averaging a thochtie more than the lawful ten knots per; an' orrders are that ye dinna exceed seeventy revs. Weel, if ye're satisfied, I'll awa' to ma bunk, for I'm unco' sleepy."

Mr. Macintosh was quite satisfied. He yawned whole-souledly as he went round the clamorous engine-room, thumbing bearings, studying gauges, performing a task that was monotonously familiar to him by virtue of much experience. He visited the stokehold, according to instructions, exchanged a word or two with the firemen there, returned to the engine-room, and, seating himself on the spare crank, cushioned into a chair, took from his pocket a much-fingered letter. He read it through with a certain hungry eagerness, almost as though he perused it for the first time, indeed, though in reality he had the script off by heart.

"Dearest man," he read; "it seems to get lonelier and lonelier. I hope you may be home in time, because I'm beginning to feel a little bit afraid. Do hurry that funny old ship back." There was a good deal more to the same effect; it was the cry of a loving woman near her travail, who feared the approaching ordeal.

"New-married men haven't any business at sea," the third engineer thought, and knew a shiver of that fear his young wife was feeling. He was sincerely in love with his bride of a year, although he had said little enough about the matter to his messmates, who were apt to treat such subjects with levity.

"Well; I hope it'll be a boy, that's all. Yes, I hope it'll be a boy;" he muttered, as, after a while, he refolded the letter and put it back in his pocket. He arose and walked round his engines, where they beat their steady, purposeful refrain. He scrutinised the revolution indicator and the steam gauges; then, half hesitatingly, he reached out a hand to the throttle-wheel. Almost imperceptibly the purposeful note of power increased; the beat quickened; he opened the throttle a little more.

"It might save a tide," he said, and went through the stokehold. The senior stoker of the watch was a decent chap enough, a married man himself. In the stifling heat, where steam jetted and furnaces roared, the third engineer revealed something of his soul's unrest to a near-naked man who sucked his teeth and nodded understandingly.

"Ay, ay, sir; I'll give you your bit extra steam," said the fireman, and cast open a furnace door, picked up a slice and busied himself craftily. The third engineer whistled softly to himself as he went back through the low doorway to the engine-room, to open the throttle even a little more. The owners could well afford the few extra shovelfuls of coal the added knots required. He went round his engines with oil-can spurting.

"There'll maybe be a deil o' a row," he conjectured; "but they canna take off knots already steamed. Gosh! I hope it'll be a laddie!"

THE water was not unduly cold, Collins found, as he emerged from the first smothering flurry of the turbulent wake. He wiped the salt from his eyes and looked about him. He saw the white stern-light of the *Perseus* dwindling to a mere brilliant point. Overhead the stars shone clearly; it was as nearly perfect a night as one could hope to see on the North Atlantic. His inflated suit was serving its purpose admirably; he floated as buoyantly as a cork. When he linked his hands behind his head and lay prone, it was for all the world as if he were lying on a cunningly-sprung couch.

Oh, it was easy—easy! He laughed, staring up at the stars. Only five short hours to wait, and then—dawn—dawn and the *Lockyer*. He presently hauled the suspended flask out from under the inflated suit and refreshed himself with a considerable drink of the excellent whisky. Easy wasn't the name for it; it was child's play; and all the result of a little painstaking care. The only hint of discomfort of which he was conscious, and it was not really discomfort—merely a hint, not a reality—was the trifling pricking sensation near his groin. That would be caused, of course, by the diamonds in his pocket, pressed on by the inflated rubber of the suit, and so thrust close to his skin. There was nothing to trouble about in that; if anything the sensation was more pleasant than otherwise; because it proved to him that his strategy had been successful. There was he, safely out of the *Perseus;* and there were the diamonds—a million dollars' worth. Some scoop.

He laughed to himself as he pictured the consternation that would reign aboard the liner when the discovery was made. They wouldn't for a moment suspect how he'd contrived to make his getaway, and they would spend a full day at least in searching the ship, every nook and cranny of her. In fancy, and to while away the time of waiting, he pictured to himself how he would conduct such a search, going into every detail, as he fine-combed the fabric. Time after time he laughed softly: a snigger of pride in his own achievement. Then he permitted himself to give thought to the future.

Landing from the *Lockyer* wouldn't be a difficult job. Captain Weyland had already explained how simply that could be managed. The crew would be chiefly concerned in getting themselves ashore for a spree; they'd take no notice of the disposal of a bit of human salvage pulled out of the Atlantic, with his story of having fallen overboard from a west-bound ship on account of a chain breaking in the hurricane rail. Once aboard the *Lockyer*, Collins intended to devote his time to breaking up the somewhat cumbersome ornaments and stitching the individual diamonds carefully into his clothing, scattering them cunningly, so that no evidence of their presence would be manifested. It would be a most simple proposition, then, to walk ashore and disappear. There'd be no advertisement of his arrival in England at all; and when once he was clear of the dock-gates, he could discover a hundred places in which to hide before he started off for the Continent, where jewels were most readily sold. Easy was the word—dead easy!

He took another swig at the flask, and found comfort. A man could almost go to sleep under these present circumstances, he decided. About another four hours or so now, not more.

HE DID, indeed, sleep a little; when he wakened the constellations had wheeled into different positions; time was passing nicely. To be sure, he couldn't get at his watches; they were inaccessible because of the character of the one-piece garment he had donned. What of it anyhow? Time didn't pass any the quicker when a man was constantly referring to a watch! And once he was aboard the *Lockyer* he could eat an honest meal, turn in and sleep the sleep of the successful man, the general of skill. He was successful, there were the diamonds; that little pricking pressure was proof.

He slept again, however, lulled by the little plash of tiny wavelets; when he wakened the stars seemed dimmer—as likely as not the dawn was not far off. He could feel a steady, powerful throb coming through the water: a curious and intriguing sound, like the beating of a Gargantuan heart. He contrived to force himself upright, and looked about at a narrowed horizon. There was a patch of black against the darkness—the glimmer of a red light. Some steamer of sorts, this was—but as the darkness still drooped thickly, it couldn't by any chance be the *Lockyer*. Everything had been arranged far too neatly for a mistake of that sort to happen. He made no outcry as a dim-seen bulk slid past him a bare quarter-mile away, because you couldn't very well explain to strangers how you came to be afloat in mid-Atlantic in an inflated rubber suit; it would look undeniably fishy, and awkward questions were sure to be asked. If the people aboard the ship weren't in the know, they might turn nasty and be proof against offered bribes; you never could tell. No—everything was sure to be all right; Weyland had assured him of that. On the crack of dawn the *Lockyer* would heave in sight. Truth to tell, Collins decided, he wouldn't be sorry; that irritating pricking sensation in his groin was becoming an annoyance; he felt that he'd like to rid himself of the rubber suit. He took another swig from the flask and watched the stern-light of the unknown steamer dwindle and die; went on waiting—using his arms and legs a little, because he was now beginning to feel stiff and chilly.

ONE good thing about the gentle exercise was that it seemed to shift the position of that irritating substance; the pricking smart had ceased. He linked his hands behind his head after a while, and stared up again at the dimming stars.

He must have dozed off once more; for when next he opened his eyes there was a radiant flush in the eastern sky. Dawn had come, thank the Lord! The diamond was pressing into his skin again; as he forced himself upright, he was conscious of a definite stab of pain. He glanced around the widening seascape; nothing was in sight. It was early enough yet, though—you must allow a few minutes—allow an hour, even, for contingencies. But at the end of an hour, with the risen sun now shining brilliantly, there was nothing to be seen, except a thin smoke-trail far to the northward. And that pricking pain in his groin was getting pretty nearly unbearable. He shifted himself, reached to the spot, and contrived to give the inflated dress a sharp twitch. That was better, he'd shifted the irritant.

And so, he discovered after a while, the pressure of the suit that had been such an annoyance, was easying. There was now no further pain, everything was very comfortable; and if the *Lockyer* would only hurry up and heave in sight, this vague quiver of apprehension that was beginning to trouble him, would end, and all present discomforts would be forgotten. Somehow, though, he didn't appear to be floating as buoyantly, quite, as before; and he fancied he could hear a trifling, whispering sound. Yes, certainly something was going wrong—he gulped sickly. The inflatable suit that had previously been fully distended was growing flabby and sagging—that was it, it was sagging!

HE DID not know it, but the shifted jewelry in his pocket had penetrated the cloth of his coat, and had nicked a trifling gash in the rubber of the life saving suit. The air escape was very inconsiderable at first, negligible, indeed, for the rubber suit was naturally constructed of double fabric, and the little gash was on the inside. But he was losing buoyancy. Presently, it was necessary to swim, in order to keep his head above water. A little breeze was growing, licking the previous calm into joyous little wavelets that slapped him merrily in the face. Presently, however, the slaps became irritating blows. Then they became a nightmare; a crashing horror. By this time he was yelling curses on the head of Captain Weyland every time his head emerged above the surface; there was no longer any trace of buoyancy in the rubber suit. And now he was fighting—fighting hard!

The sagging folds of the collapsed suit were dragging him down! Up again! He wasn't finished yet—no, not by a darned sight! Curse the *Lockyer* anyway! If Weyland had double-crossed him he'd seek him out, no matter where on earth's face he tried to hide himself, and then—by God, then there'd be an accounting for you! No man let Charlie Collins down and went on feeling good and happy!

Of course, he thought, if he could only rid himself of that terrible outer garment that had promised so much, it would still be easy—oh, yes, easy! But the durned thing's very nature made that idea absurd. Never mind, he'd swim; oh yes, he'd swim—swim like all hades!

And where was that cursed steamer?

IT WAS growing very cold, and the day seemed in some fashion to be darkening. By a queer travesty of thought, Collins discovered himself to be thinking of Edith Wemyss. No, he wasn't—he was thinking of that big Irish policeman he shot at the corner of Ninth and Thirty-third six months before. Funny, that man looked, the big hick, with that blue mark in his forehead and the glazed stare in his eyes! Almost as funny as the *Perseus's* purser looked when he saw the doped handkerchief descending to his face!

And here was Strike Murphy, who'd been sent to the chair because he was in the way of a better man. A whole lot of men he'd known, there were—all of them swimming silently about him, reaching out playfully menacing hands to claw at his throat and choke back the air that was so necessary. They'd got their grip, too, curse them! They were strangling him—strangling him! But he'd show 'em—

"I'll show 'em—I'm Charlie Collins—Best of the lot—!" He was the man who was an artist; the man who took things easy and did the big jobs. Easy it was—easy! You simply—simply—

He forgot to think now, fighting blindly. He was down—going down—no, by heck! he was coming up, soaring high, feeling as light as a cork. Lighter than air, indeed. He wanted to flit up to the sky!

But he swallowed a mouthful of water. That fetched him back to realities. Curse those fools in the *Lockyer!* They'd made some fool mistake, of course—in a job of this sort you couldn't trust any man but yourself.

Collins made an astonishing discovery. If he didn't struggle; if he didn't use up his strength in fighting the unfightable sea, but just lay quietly back, his hands behind his head, looking skywards, he didn't sink. There were still some little puffs of air remaining in the water tight suit. Struggling simply expelled them and made him less buoyant. There you were—it proved his theory! The easier you were the better. Fighting only pumped the sustaining air through the cuts caused by the diamonds. Easiness—it was the joker of the whole deck; couldn't fail.

A whirling sea bird mewed plaintively and swooped down toward him, looking as big as an albatross. It scented food, but when he splashed the water it swung wide of him and tracked towards a steamer. Collins watched its flight—then he saw the thin tuft of smoke against the sky.

"DONE it!" he gasped. He'd beaten the lot—here was the *Loycker*, late on her timing, but here, according to programme more or less. He tried to content himself with idle floating; but he began to be afraid lest he mightn't be noticed. The sea was a mighty big place, and he was a mighty small speck in it. He went on trying to force himself upwards in the water to make himself bigger and easier to distinguish, and the doing of it expelled more air from his suit. A wave of panic troubled him. But the steamer was showing bigger now, he could see her hull. If they didn't see him—if they didn't—

He was fighting harder than ever now. It was wild, senseless struggling; none of his movements were coordinated. But the steamer was drawing nearer and nearer. It seemed like a vast, mobile cliff. If those aboard didn't see him he'd be run down and scuppered out of hand. He began to yell frantically, waving his arms every time he emerged. He fancied he heard a very distant throbbing sound, mixed up with clanging of bells.

But the world was darkening about him, and it was getting cold. Bells were ringing again; and just when the blackness was getting densest a stabbing agony of pain shot through his shoulder. That was the way folk died, he thought—and it wasn't easy.

NO; HE wasn't dead. Nothing of the sort, he was very much alive. He was warm and wrapped snugly in blankets near a snapping, glowing stove.

"I've won, by heck's own thunder!" he decided. "Say—Weyland, we beat 'em, eh? You are Weyland, aren't you?" There was someone near at hand; he could hear unmistakable human breathing. "It was easy, Weyland, dead easy! You ought to have seen that purser's face when he got the dope—but I got the sparklers all right, all right! Thought you weren't ever coming, though; you gave me a scare, Weyland. Who'd have thought the sparklers'd have come so near to doing a man in?" He was only half-conscious; and customary restraints were relaxed. Somehow or other his tongue seemed not quite under his control—it wagged in words that his brain told him were better unuttered. Still, after pulling a trick of that sort a man had a right to blow a bit.

"What've you done with the beauties, Weyland?" he asked, turning his head.

"They're safe—don't you fret," said a voice that wasn't Weyland's at all; a very different kind of voice: crisp and curt.

"Hell!" stammered Collins. "Who're you? This is the *Lockyer*, ain't it?"

"U. S. Ice Patrol, *Quinlan*. Called up by *Perseus*, asked to follow her track. Guess we're some followers! We got the diamonds and we got *you*. Calculated the sparklers are worth most; but they won't blame us for finding you both. Reckon you must have been trying to run a diamond-making plant in mid-Atlantic, buddy; but you'll be able to explain that in the right quarter. Meantime, drink this—beef juice laced with rum." One hand pushed a steaming mug towards Collins's dropped mouth; another hand held a gun. The men of the *Quinlan* were taking no chances.

"Of course," said the owner of the hands thoughtfully; "you might have been running a diamond-hatchery out here!"

Collins stared bleakly nowhere in particular. Dead easy, eh? Caught with the goods—and they'd remember everything else! Damn Weyland! Damn the *Lockyer!*

CAPTAIN WEYLAND and his first mate stared out over a wilderness of deserted water. They shrugged their shoulders.

"Expect he didn't pull it off," Weyland said. "That's ten thousand dollars out of my pocket; blamed if I know what I'll tell the wife when I see her!"

"According to his way of it, it was the easiest thing in life," grunted the mate.

The *Lockyer's* third engineer smiled in his sleep. With any sort of luck they'd catch an earlier tide, thanks to that extra spurt in the middle watch; and he might conceivably be back in time for the boy's arrival! Diamonds didn't trouble him.

Part Three
of the Last Word in Mystery Stories

The Smiling DEATH

By FRANCIS D. GRIERSON

Preceding events briefly retold

A smiling dead man is discovered in a London doorway by Roger Kent and Peter Felle who are walking home in the fog from a fashionable night club. They report to a near by police station where they run into Detective-Inspector Sims, and Professor Wells, the latter affectionately called "Uncle" by Kent. They find that Wells, a toxicology specialist, has for many years unofficially aided Scotland Yard and is a particular friend of Inspector Sims.

Sims is very much interested in the body they have found because of the smile on the face which is identical with the expression he has seen on numerous other bodies during the last few years. The coroner's report on these cases had always been "death due to heart failure." Both Sims and Wells believe these deaths are not from natural causes, they intend to investigate this case thoroughly and ask Kent and Felle to aid them. Both agree and Kent remembers that just previous to finding the body an apparently terrified girl brushed by them in the fog.

The next morning Kent starts out on a book collecting tour, a favorite occupation with him, but chooses the section of London in which they found the dead man. He really hopes to again see the girl who passed him in the fog. In his ramblings he goes into a strange bookshop, that of Gregory Marle. Here he sees Marle, Foster, his assistant—and to his great surprise the girl he has been looking for—she is Miss Fayne, Marle's ward.

He goes at once to Sims with this information though he does so reluctantly as he is much taken with Miss Fayne's appearance. At Sims' office he also finds Professor Wells and learns Marle is expected to call shortly to tell something about the dead man and possibly about his death.

Marle appears, first having identified the body at the morgue as that of Señor Garcia, a customer of his. Marle also states that he is afraid young Foster has unintentionally caused his death by attacking him the previous evening, in defense of Miss Fayne, on whom Garcia forced his attentions. Sims says this is impossible as Foster's encounter with Garcia was witnessed, following which each went his way. Also Foster spent the remainder of the evening at a Y. M. C. A. boxing bout where he was seen by many. Marle gave his information about Foster with apparent reluctance telling what he knew only because he deemed it his duty. He seemed deeply agitated and dropped his stick which the professor retrieved for him.

Wells takes the things found on Garcia's body home with him to look them over. He tells Sims that he has found a small puncture in Garcia's neck which escaped the police surgeon's notice. Both feel sure Garcia died from effect of some deadly poison used in a minute quantity.

That evening when Sims calls at the professor's house Wells surprises him by showing a message received by Garcia written in a cross-word puzzle cipher which reads: *Last warning—if pearls are not returned today you die.*

Professor Wells worked this message out from a cross-word puzzle found in Garcia's wallet. This puzzle was done in pen and ink and headed *For the Gazette.* It was apparently intended to be

submitted to that paper for publication. It seemed so obviously of no importance that Sims had given it no attention. The professor finding it among the exhibits and being quite a puzzle fan tried to solve it. After working some time on it without being able to cross a single word, he became suspicious that it was not a legitimate puzzle but some sort of cipher.

The professor further informs Sims that when he picked up Marle's ebony stick the day before it was extremely light considering the size and material. He believes that Garcia was shot with a poisoned dart from an air gun; and that Marle's stick is the air gun. Sims agrees that the suspicion seems reasonable but that motive and evidence must be secured.

Marle calls on Professor Wells and threatens to kill him if he further investigates the Garcia case or himself, Marle the bookseller. Marle admits being responsible for Garcia's death, but laughingly points out that Wells can prove nothing. He also states that Pamela Fayne has nothing whatever to do with his activity outside of the bookshop.

Sims is called in by a jeweler, Mr. Baumberg, to help recover some stolen pearls. From Mr. Baumberg's story it is evident that Garcia stole these pearls and that they are the ones referred to in the cross-word puzzle cipher.

CHAPTER XIII

WHEN they returned to the inspector's room at Scotland Yard they found Professor Wells there, sprawled over an armchair, placidly smoking his pipe.

Giving Sergeant Andrews some instructions and sending him off to execute them, Sims sat down and lit a cigaret.

"Well, Professor," he said, "what's in the wind?"

"I came here to ask you that," replied the scientist lazily.

"You do not usually carry loaded firearms," pursued the detective reflectively. "I hope you remembered to put the safety catch on?"

"It does bulge, rather," the professor admitted calmly. "I will put it in a less conspicuous place."

Taking a heavy automatic pistol from his tweed jacket, he placed it in the hip pocket of his trousers.

Roger regarded this proceeding with astonishment. Nevertheless he was beginning to get accustomed to the ellipses and half-hints which seemed to form a great part of these men's conversation.

"We've been having a chat," Sims remarked, "with Mr. Morris Baumberg, whose pearls were stolen the other day. It was Garcia who stole them all right, although it was not until today that we could get the real story out of Baumberg."

"Your charm of manner, my dear fellow," Wells suggested.

"Funk!" replied Sims concisely. "Mr. Baumberg had worked himself into a thoroughly unhappy state, so he decided, as the novelists say, to tell all he knew—or most of it."

"And you told him the rest," put in Roger.

The professor laughed.

"That is a little habit Sims has," he said.

The detective had been watching Wells with covert attention.

"Wells," he said, "I wish you'd tell us what has happened," and there was no laughter in his voice.

The professor got up. He had been sitting in the shadow, but now the light from the window fell on his face, and Roger saw that his eyes were those of a man who needs sleep.

Wells leaned against the mantelpiece and thrust his hands into his pockets.

"Why," he said, "a good deal has happened. To begin with, I have had a long and most interesting conversation with that cultured dealer in books, Mr. Gregory Marle."

SIMS sat in silence while the scientist described his interview with the bookseller, and Roger followed his example, although it was with difficulty that he imitated the detective's grave attention.

"A very singular man," Sims said thoughtfully, when Wells had concluded.

"A damned dangerous blackguard," Roger burst out, unable to restrain himself any longer.

Wells shook his head reflectively

"That is not quite the word," he said. "Marle is not a blackguard; that is, I don't think he'd let down anybody who trusted him. He's simply a man with a kink in his moral code."

"But a man like that is a public danger," Roger protested, startled into what was for him positive loquacity.

"Certainly; and the public must be protected from him," replied the scientist coolly. "I propose to take a hand in doing so."

Sims looked at him curiously.

"Now tell us what happened afterward," he said.

The professor tapped the ashes from his pipe, and refilled it.

"Well," he said, "friend Marle certainly does not let the grass grow under his feet. When he made me what was, after all, a sporting offer to let him alone, he probably foresaw that I should refuse it—although we must still give him the credit for making the offer. When he had gone, I tried to put myself in his place, and I think I succeeded to some extent. As you know, my house in Russel Square is rather an old-fashioned one, and it is not particularly hard to enter. One of Marle's friends—as I have no doubt—entered it in the middle of the night, and stabbed me to the heart!"

"What the devil do you mean?" demanded Roger, staring at the lusty figure before him.

"A little deception on my part," Wells explained, chuckling, "which I am afraid will annoy Mr. Marle. Some time ago," he went on, "a friend of mine who is interested in anthropometry had some wax busts of the human torso made in connection with certain experiments which I need not go into now. One of them he lent to me, and it was in my laboratory. I arranged it in my bed, drawing the bedclothes well over the head. Then I put the bedside lamp out of order, so that it could not be switched on, and smoked my pipe in the library. I thought that if the house were entered, I should hear the visitor, let him go upstairs and, if that was his idea, murder me, and then catch him neatly as he came down.

"That was where I made the mistake. The man came in from the top instead of from the bottom, and got out the same way. I had forgotten that the house next door is being repaired, and there is a scaffolding at the back. Any active man could climb to the roof without being noticed. That is what my visitor did. From the roof of the house next door he crossed to my roof, got through a skylight, and so down to my bedroom. Then, I think, he flashed a small pocket torch cautiously; saw, as he thought, the body in the bed, buried a knife in it, and cleared out without delay. The knife was skilfully planted, and he could feel pretty sure there was no need to make certain I was dead."

"By Jove!" cried Roger. "It's pretty horrible, and yet I can't help smiling at the thought of Marle's rage when he finds out how he's been done."

"I can," said the inspector grimly. "It'll make him all the more dangerous. Any clues?" he added, addressing the professor.

"None. The fellow wore rubber gloves, evidently, as one would expect, and dropped no matches, or anything else that might help. It was the forced skylight that showed me how he got in."

"I'll have two plain-clothes men on duty there from now on," said Sims. "It won't be long before Marle finds out that you're alive."

"HE'S found it out already," said Wells coolly. "As I drove down here this morning a heavy motor van smashed into us on the embankment. My chauffeur got a nasty cut on the head, but nothing worse, I'm glad to say. I was shaken up, and couldn't get a glimpse of the driver's face. There was no policeman near, and the van drove off hell-for-leather, with a smashed mudguard."

Sims swore softly.

"I'll have the ingenious Mr. Marle in a cell within two hours," he said, and reached for the telephone.

But Wells caught his arm.

"You'll do nothing of the sort," he said. "Let's face the facts, Sims. What are you going to charge him with?"

"Murder, or being accessory to murder, and to attempted murder, on his own confession; and probably other crimes," said the detective, a little dubiously.

Wells laughed.

"Come, old fellow," he said, "that won't do, and you know it. We couldn't go into court with that face, and Marle knows it as well as you do. As to his confession, what did he confess? And who did he confess it to? There were no witnesses, and his word is as good as mine in a court of law. We'll have to get something more definite before we can lay a finger on him."

The inspector frowned gloomily at the papers on his desk.

"Besides," the professor went on, "I want to get right to the bottom of this affair. There's a lot in it that I don't understand yet. Marle is an extraordinary man. You know as well as I do that nobody does anything without a motive. You don't stoop down to tie up your bootlace unless it has come undone. What's Marle's game? I'm quite sure he doesn't kill people just for the pleasure of taking life, he's not that sort of a man. Indeed, from what he said, I gathered that he selects his victims according to some law of his own."

"He's mad," said Sims bluntly.

"Perhaps, but you must admit that there is method in his madness. And as to being mad: how is one to say what madness is? You may have a man who is a religious maniac, for instance, but can you put him in jail for it? When I hear people say, 'So-and-so is mad on golf', or billiards, or cards, or motoring, I often think their suggestion is really rather near the truth. To be mad is simply to have a disordered intellect; it is the *degree* of disorder that influences a doctor in certifying a patient as insane. If you had heard Gregory Marle talking to me, you would have said that he was a good deal more sane than many excitable men you know."

"What do you suggest, then?"

"I suggest that we let Marle alone until we have made absolutely sure of a conviction. If you arrested him now, you would have to let him go again, and then we should probably lose any chance of discovering his secret."

The detective took out a cigaret and tapped it on his desk, but did not light it.

"Look here, Wells," he said suddenly, "why not drop it, as Marle suggested? After all, you're not a policeman, and there's no need for you to risk your life like this."

Well's face hardened.

"I know you mean that kindly," he said, "but you don't really believe I'm going to take his advice, or yours either, in this matter. I suppose it's just pride, but you can take it from me, Sims, that either I get Marle, or he gets me. He's a clever man, and I don't know who's going to win, but I tell you frankly I'm not going to do another stroke of work until Gregory Marle is behind prison bars—or I'm dead."

It was not often that the scientist spoke with such passion, and Sims knew that no words of his could change his friend's determination.

"All right," he said simply. "I'm with you."

Roger Kent said nothing, but he privately decided that he would not like to stand in the shoes of Mr. Gregory Marle.

CHAPTER XIV

THERE are many awkward situations in life; a famous humorist has said that the most awkward of them all is to find oneself in a bootshop, about to try on a pair of shoes, and suddenly to realize that one has a hole in one's sock.

But the situation in which Roger Kent found himself was even more awkward; and if it possessed any element of humor, it was humor of a sardonic kind which he was in no mood to appreciate.

He knew now that he was in love with Pamela Fayne, and to a man of his stamp love was no light adventure. But Pamela's guardian, he was forced to believe, was a most accomplished scoundrel, and the thought that Pamela should remain in the care of such a man was almost intolerable.

Not that Roger doubted for one moment either Pamela's innocence or her courage. He was as firmly convinced that she suspected nothing of her guardian's intrigues as that she would turn from the man in horror the moment such a suspicion entered her mind.

But Gregory Marle, as Roger admitted to himself, was a remarkable man: there was a certain charm about his manner which even Roger, knowing his double life, would, he realized, find it difficult to resist. And Pamela had no such reason to resist it.

The old bookseller, too, had treated his ward with a consideration and gentleness which had been very welcome to the lonely girl, and Roger foresaw that it would be almost impossible to detach her from the influence of her guardian without opening her eyes to his real character.

For that purpose no half measures would suffice. Pamela was too loyal a nature to accept hinted disparagement of one to whom she had given her hearty gratitude and no small measure of affection—indeed, the maker of such a suggestion would be likely to injure his own cause more than that of Gregory Marle. Nothing short of the whole truth would satisfy the girl, and the substantiation of its verity by unquestionable proofs.

Such proofs Roger was not then able to supply.

TO ATTEMPT to warn the girl against her guardian without such evidence might not only ruin his own prospects; in her indignation she might even repeat the suggestion to Marle. Although it was evident from his conversation with the professor that the bookseller was well aware that he was an object of suspicion, Roger was not sure that he himself was included in the list of Mr. Marle's enemies, and saw no reason to place himself on it prematurely. It was true that he and Peter Felle had found Garcia's body, and had thus been associated in some degree with the professor and with Inspector Sims; but there was, so far as he knew, no reason why Mr. Marle should believe him or his friend to be more intimately connected with the authorities than their discovery of the body would necessitate.

It might even be—and Roger smiled grimly as the idea occurred to him—that Mr. Marle thought it not a bad thing to foster his acquaintanceship with two young men of decent social standing who were on terms of civility with such powers as Sims and Wells.

Roger felt that his duty was plain and for once duty and inclination went hand in hand. For the more he thought of it, the more he dreaded the moment when Pamela must suffer the shock of knowing that her guardian was standing in the shadow of the gallows.

Although he would gladly have taken her away at once, Roger did not believe that she was in peril. Mr. Marle seemed to have taken steps to spare her any intimate association with his darker world—for Roger was satisfied that the old man had been sincere in his assertion that he knew nothing of Garcia's unwelcome attentions to the girl.

It seemed, then, that for the moment the only thing to do was to let matters take their course, and to rely on the greater wisdom and experience of the professor and the inspector to indicate the time and place for active interference.

Meanwhile, of course, it was his obvious duty to acquire Pamela Fayne's confidence, so that she might trust him fully when the hour of need arrived. This was a pleasant conclusion, and Roger proceeded to discharge his duty with an ardor enhanced by a comfortable feeling of righteousness.

HENCE it was that, some three days following the attempt to murder the professor, Roger and his friend Peter found themselves in Sandy's, making a selection among the seventy different sandwiches to be obtained at that famous West End bar. Roger, having heard a casual reference to a certain sale which Pamela was to attend on Mr. Marle's behalf, had arrived in the neighborhood early in the morning, reconnoitred, and withdrawn; to reappear an hour later and "drop in" with an air of mild interest as the auctioneer plied his hammer.

Whether Pamela was deceived by this maneuver is doubtful; but she certainly showed no displeasure.

When Roger entered Sandy's shortly before three o'clock the experienced Peter perceived at a glance that his friend was not dissatisfied with life.

"The hot savory mince is particularly jolly today," remarked Peter, who was perched on a high stool in the cosiest corner of the bar, beneath the Orpen picture which was one of the many gifts made to "Sandy" (himself a polished actor) by famous artists, who had made the walls of the little place a gallery unique of its kind.

"An American Club, please," said Roger to the white-coated barman; "I'm hungry."

Not until the many-layered and seductive comestible had appeared, piping hot, and had disappeared, washed down by a great cup of fragrant coffee with a crown of cream; and Roger had discussed with the ex-officer barman the choice of a lighter delicacy "to follow"; not until then did Peter put his question.

"Any luck?" he asked plainly.

Roger smiled.

"She'll come," he said.

"Top-hole!" cried Peter gaily. "We'll shake the merry leg, and uncork the bubbly that Bel wouldn't let me bring round to her show."

"Bel?" repeated Roger dryly.

"I can't help thinking of her like that," the youth explained with some embarrassment; "though of course I haven't called her that—yet."

Roger laughed.

"Modest fellow," he said. "Your shy, retiring ways fill me with respectful admiration."

"You needn't talk—" began Peter warmly, and stopped.

A burly figure sauntering down the quiet street—oddly quiet, surrounded as it was by the roar of the great West End thoroughfares—had stopped, looked in, and entered.

"Hullo, Professor," the cheerful youth went on. "I didn't know you frequented this frivolous establishment."

"I don't," replied Professor Wells, glancing about him at the oaken walls, where panels inscribed with famous autographs were interspersed among the pictures; "I don't, but I like to see how the rich live, sometimes."

"The rich," echoed Peter, laughing. "Well, you certainly get crowds of rich people in here, but the charm of this place is its mixture. You may have a millionaire on one side of you, and a fellah with a working capital of one-and-eleven pence halfpenny on the other."

"Have some grub, Uncle?" suggested the practical Roger, but Wells shook his head.

"I've lunched," he explained. "But that coffee looks enticing. Would a pipe be—?"

"You can smoke a *hookah*, if you like," Roger assured him. "Sandy's is a place where you can do whatever you like so long as you don't annoy anybody else."

"Very sound rule," the professor commented, as he perched himself on a stool, sipped his coffee, and proceeded to fill his briar.

"ANY news?" asked Roger guardedly, for although the luncheon hour rush had subsided, there were still a few groups of people eating, smoking and chatting in corners.

Wells shook his head.

"You will find," he said, "that patience is a very necessary virtue in these affairs."

Roger was silent. He had not yet told Peter of the later developments in the case. Sims had decided, for reasons which Roger did not question, to postpone the explanation.

As they chatted, the genial Sandy himself looked in to see how his very competent manager was getting on, and presently came up from the nether regions into the bar.

Peter, who knew everybody, hailed him and made him known to the scientist.

"Professor Wells?" said Sandy. "Why, my dear sir, you are as a sheep led to the slaughter! I *must* have your signature for one of my panels."

"More than he ever said to me," grumbled Peter ruefully.

"Wait till you grow up," said Sandy calmly, as he took a spare oaken panel from the alert barman.

"But I'm not in this world of yours," Wells protested. "Indeed, *you* are much better known than I am, you know. I've seen you act, and I've read some of those delightful books and verses of yours, too."

The actor smiled.

"If you've seen me act, and still come to my bar, you give me courage!" he said.

The professor goodhumoredly submitted, and headed the new panel with his signature, scrawled with Roger's fountain pen.

As the professor and the two young men emerged into the street and turned toward Piccadilly Circus, Roger saw a man who had been looking with great interest into a shop window opposite, yawn, glance at his watch, and stroll casually after them.

Wells saw him too, and frowned.

As Peter stopped for a moment to shriek a greeting to a pretty girl driving her motorcar coolly in the press of traffic, Roger indicated the unobtrusive stranger with a jerk of his chin.

"One of Sims' men," the professor explained. "He's got a silly idea that I need protection."

Roger nodded approvingly.

"WELL, if you young men can tear yourselves away from the gaieties of the West End for an hour or two," the professor went on as Peter rejoined them, "what about eating with me tonight?"

Roger hesitated.

"We'd love to sir," said Peter hastily, "but the fact is—"

"You've got better fish to fry," suggested the professor.

"Rather not!" Peter protested, confusedly.

"We've asked Miss Fayne and Miss Dene to dine," explained Roger calmly.

"Excellent!" said the professor heartily. "You must come to me another time."

"Look here, sir," cried Peter, with a sudden inspiration; "why shouldn't you come as well?"

"I?" said the professor, smiling. "My dear boy, you youngsters don't want an old fogey like me."

"Yes, we do!" Peter assured him earnestly. "Oh, damn it!" he went on, as the scientist chuckled. "I didn't mean that. I mean, we'd be most awfully bucked—we would, really—wouldn't we, Roger?"

"Rather," agreed Roger, with obvious sincerity. "Do come, sir."

The professor hesitated. There were times when a certain loneliness assailed him, that all the resources of science could not dispel. And from the advances of hostesses, who would have been delighted to lionize him he fled shuddering.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To the Toad's Hole," said Peter.

"A night club," Roger explained. "One of Peter's low haunts."

"It's not low," Peter protested indignantly. "It's a most respectable place (that's why I chose it), but quite jolly."

"I like that 'but,' " said Wells, laughing.

Eventually he consented to "look in" during the evening after dinner, and with this the friends had to be content.

As Roger watched him striding vigorously away toward a certain quiet club, he saw also the unobtrusive man quicken his steps and take the same direction.

CHAPTER XV

THAT respectable but jolly institution, the Toad's Hole, was one of the numerous centers of nocturnal jollity which have become a feature of the life of that section of London's millions which is provided with money to spend.

It differed, however, from many otherwise similar resorts, for it was one of those places where it was possible to enjoy oneself without fearing a police raid which would have as its sequel a morning appearance before one of the Metropolitan magistrates.

The management desired their members and guests to have a good time; but they also desired to make money, and to continue to make it. Therefore they permitted no sale—open or disguised—of intoxicants after the closing hour fixed by the government—a grandmotherly government, perhaps, but nevertheless able to make it very unpleasant for those who disregarded their rules and regulations.

Recognizing, too, that there are still a few people who like to enjoy themselves without participating in a positive orgy, the management discouraged the grosser activities of those people who believe that a licensed house is necessarily a house of license, and that because drinks are served they may be consumed to the point at which the consumers become a nuisance to everybody else.

At a snug corner table in the largest room of the Toad's Hole that evening assembled a merry party. If Roger had considered Pamela attractive in a coat-frock, he realized that he knew no words adequate to describe her in a black evening gown of cunningly simple cut that clung to the lines of her slim body.

So unoriginal is man, that Peter was thinking much the same about Claribel Dene.

What the two young women thought about their hosts is a secret known only to themselves, but subsequent events suggest that they were not wholly unmoved by the respectful admiration which the young men involuntarily expressed with their eyes, although their tongues were too well disciplined to utter it at this stage.

TO PAMELA the Toad's Hole came as a new experience. The tiny green toads that stood on the table with menus thrust into their backs; the great toad, cleverly lifelike, that crouched in a sort of shrine cut in one of the walls; the waiters, with their green sashes instead of waistcoats; the hum of gay conversation breaking through the music of a band which at this hour played only soft melodies; all these and a dozen other things delighted her eyes and ears as much as the food and drink pleased the excellent appetite which the modern girl is not ashamed to possess.

To Claribel Dene, in truth, her surroundings were less strange than either Peter or Roger suspected. For Bel had her own secrets. But the place pleased her none the less because she could appreciate with greater experience than her friend the deft service of their waiter and the excellence of the *hors d'œuvres*.

Peter had chosen the Toad's Hole for a variety of reasons. To begin with, the food was good, and Peter was wise enough to know that even a man's divinity cannot be expected to be at her best over cold soup, tough *poulet roti* or champagne that has, so to speak, lost something of its convexity.

He had at first thought of suggesting dinner at the Carlton, and an adjournment to the night club afterward. But there is a chill grandeur about the Carlton that the maddest gaiety can not wholly disguise, and he relied on the intimate warmth of the little club to bridge that moment of stiffness so dangerous to the success of the first concerted meeting of four people who had, after all, known each other but a short time.

Peter was wise in his generation. Roger had tacitly abandoned to him the lead in this enterprise of entertainment, and the younger man did not let him down. So that when the band, metaphorically girding up its loins, began to play with great verve music that set everybody's toes twitching, it was a well-fed and joyous pair of young women that placed half-smoked cigarets in the ash-trays, rose with alacrity and proceeded to fox-trot round the cleared space in the middle of the room. The crowd that usually dropped in later in the evening, as the theaters closed, were still busy with their own affairs, and there was ample room for the couples to move freely.

To his secret joy, Roger, whose strong point was not dancing, found that his step exactly suited that of Pamela. It did not occur to him, fortunately, that Pamela, being that rare thing, a natural dancer, had in a few bars of the music adapted her movements to his own. His success gave him courage, and when in duty bound he asked Bel for the next dance, he performed quite creditably. Peter, of course, fox-trotted with the easy assurance of an athletic youth who had put much money into the hands of professional exponents of the art, but somehow Pamela found herself thinking that she preferred the conscientiously careful movements of the grave Roger.

Bel, on the other hand—

But to go farther would be to approach the insoluble problem of the way of a maid with a man. The subject is interesting but illimitable.

TO THIS merry party came presently Professor Wells, and in four minutes had achieved the conquest of both girls' hearts.

In deference to their presence he produced a long cigar, but Peter, assuring him that Toad's and ceremony had no use for each other, accused him of having his inevitable pipe concealed about his person. He denied it strenuously, but when Bel threatened to search him he shamefacedly produced a briar from the pocket of his tail-coat.

With secret glee Peter urged him to dance—and was promptly hoist with his own petard. It was not for nothing that the professor had taken lessons for the purpose of dancing with La Joyeuse, the *premier danseuse* of the Bal *Babouche* in Paris, and he promptly led Bel into the circle of dancers and swung her round with an ease and agility that made the young men stare.

At last the merry evening came to an end. Peter had garaged his car behind the club, and he and Roger proposed to take the girls to their homes.

But Roger had a qualm as they stood on the pavement while Wells said good-by. He twitched the scientist's sleeve when Pamela and Bel were safely ensconced in the car.

"I don't want to be a nuisance," he whispered, "but I wish you'd come along with us. There's tons of room, and we can drop you in Russell Square. It's pretty late—"

"Don't be an ass, Roger," the professor interrupted. Brushing aside the other's expostulations, he lifted his opera hat and walked away, humming a snatch of the tune to which he had been dancing.

Roger, vaguely depressed, and annoyed at his own depression, got into the car, and Peter drove off.

THE professor strode briskly across Piccadilly Circus, along Coventry Street and across Leicester Square, and turned into Charing Cross Road. He saw, with a mixture of amusement and annoyance, that the Scotland Yard man was almost at his heels.

Distinguished though he was by his well-balanced brain and his power of logical reasoning, Wells had in him a certain queer vein of obstinate pride that at rare intervals had been allowed to obscure his judgment. Although he had been forced to admit Sims' commonsense view of his danger, he was conscious of a quite unreasonable annoyance at the unceasing vigilance of the men told off to watch over his safety.

His interview with Gregory Marle, and the subsequent attempts on his life, had stirred him far more than he had allowed to appear. He felt that the mystery of the Smiling Death had narrowed itself to a struggle between himself and the bookseller, and he almost unconsciously resented the appearance of any other combatants in the arena.

Either he would defeat Marle, he determined, or Marle would defeat him, and he preferred—illogically enough, as he would have admitted in the case of any one else—to rely on his own resources rather than to avail himself of the help of the police.

Marle's attempts to murder him were, he realized, serious enough. But now, forewarned, he meant to leave his enemies no opportunity to strike at him unawares. Marle, clever as he undoubtedly was—and Wells did not a second time make the mistake of underrating his opponent—should find his task a more difficult one than he had imagined.

In a sudden spirit of mischief the professor glanced warily in the direction of his escort. It would be amusing, he decided, to test the man's powers, and if he could shake him off he would spend a pleasant five minutes in roasting Sims about the capabilities of his men.

Turning suddenly, he retraced his steps for some distance, and then cut through into the narrow streets of Soho. In and out he wound for a full half hour, but always when he paused the silent figure appeared, unobtrusive, but ever watchful.

"A good man, that," Wells admitted, and tried an old trick.

Hailing a crawling taxicab, he handed the man half a crown, promising him another if he reached Kings Cross in a quarter of an hour. Jumping in, he banged the door behind him and slipped out of the vehicle by the opposite door, closing it gently. The unsuspecting cabbie put on speed, but Wells had already threaded the traffic and was hurrying down the street.

But the Scotland Yard man had evidently realized that Wells, for some reason, was piping a tune for him to dance to, and was on his mettle. He was not to be caught so simply, and two minutes later the professor saw him again, unconcernedly buying a box of matches from a street-seller, while Wells hesitated as to his next move.

QUICKLY the professor made his way back to Piccadilly Circus and thrust himself into a knot of people waiting for omnibuses. Jostling, and being jostled in return, he hurried along, gaining some fifty yards on his pursuer. Turning sharply, he made for the revolving door at the entrance to a great hotel where all day and half the night there is a double stream of people entering and leaving. He crossed the great entrance hall, slipped out by a side door, and doubled back, then plunged again into Soho, and this time he was successful. He had shaken off Sims' man.

Chuckling, he made his way in the direction of Russell Square, his steps echoing in the almost deserted streets he chose.

Suddenly he glanced round, stopped, and then stepped into a doorway. He was being followed again—but this time it was not Sims' man who pursued him. Quickly as his follower had effaced himself in the shadow of a building, Wells had seen enough to note the difference between the bearing of the police officer and the furtive movements of this new pursuer.

He slipped his hand into the pocket of his light overcoat, but it did not close on the smooth butt of his automatic pistol. The weapon was no longer there.

Wells cursed his own carelessness. A dozen times his pocket might have been picked, so intent had he been on baffling the Scotland Yard man—and that very preoccupation, of course, had prevented him from noticing this other man, who had doubtless trailed him patiently all the time. A smart fellow, too, for he had not been deceived by Wells' ruse at the hotel.

Well, he had taken the first trick, the professor admitted, but the game was still unfinished.

Firmly gripping his heavy walking stick, the professor stepped out into the middle of the roadway, midway between the two pavements, and walked on.

A hundred yards further on the street turned sharply, and Wells stopped to glance behind him, but there was nothing to be seen.

He walked on, looking about him alertly, and listening for any suspicious sound.

At last he came almost to a turning which he knew would lead him in the direction he wished, and as he did so he heard two voices quarreling and cursing. Then came a dull thud, a groan—and silence.

Quickening his steps, Wells turned the corner. On the pavement lay the huddled body of a man, one arm doubled awkwardly beneath him.

Cautiously Wells looked about him. Then he approached the prone man and bent over him.

As he did so a man shod in felt-covered shoes stepped noiselessly from a doorway. His left hand was in his pocket, but in his right he swung aloft a silent and deadly weapon, a long, slim canvas bag filled with sand.

Savagely he struck—struck again and again.

The first man sprang up, and both stooped over the professor's body.

"He'll do!" said the man with the sandbag laconically. Taking something from the professor's pocket, he rose, and the two men vanished into the darkness.

CHAPTER XVI

"BUT it's simply damnable—doing nothing like this," Roger protested. "It's a fortnight since that swine got Wells, and we haven't done a thing—"

"Wait a minute, Kent," Inspector Sims interrupted, forcing himself to speak quietly. "If we go on like this, we shall be losing our tempers, and saying things we may regret later on."

"I don't want to be rude," said Roger, obstinately, "but—"

"But you are," Sims declared plainly. "Now, listen to me, young man: I'm going to tell you a few things that will be good for your soul. In the first place, *I'm* running this show, not you—and I'll thank you to remember it. Good heavens, man, if one of your subalterns had talked to you in the army as you've talked to me in my own office, you'd have bitten his head off!"

"That's a fact," put in Peter Felle, with such fervor that the other two who had almost forgotten his presence in their heat swung round, stared at him, and suddenly burst out laughing.

"I'm sorry," said Roger frankly; "I'm afraid I've been damned offensive. But it makes me so mad to think of the professor being caught like that, and to be *morally* certain who arranged it, without being able to prove it."

"Blast that old bookselling hypocrite!" put in, Greek choruslike, Peter Felle, who had by this time been acquainted with the proceedings of Mr. Marle.

"He's not much of a hypocrite, fair play to him," the inspector rejoined. "I must admit he gave Wells warning before he hit him."

"Why shouldn't we play his own game?" asked Peter.

"His own game?" repeated the detective. "How do you mean?"

"You say you can't arrest him because you can't prove that he's broken the law: well, why not make him break the law?"

"Are you tight?" asked Roger.

"Not at all," Peter answered. "What I mean is, why not frame up a crime on him, the way they do in the American novels? Then you can arrest him, and keep him safe in a jolly little cell, where he can't do any mischief, until you've got your proof about other things."

Inspector Sims smiled wearily.

"I am afraid we must rely on less picturesque methods," he answered.

"Sims," said Roger, who had been reflecting, "you're not taking this lying down, I'll swear. Look here, what are you up to? Can't I be in it?"

SIMS took out a cigaret, lit it and made three distinct smoke rings before he replied.

"I am glad," he said, a little dryly, "that you credit me with sufficient courage to resent being jumped on by Mr. Marle with both feet."

"I say—" protested Roger.

"The fact is," the inspector went on, "we are all in the same boat. I am just as savage about Wells as you are. Damn it all, man, if you knew a tenth of what Wells has done for me, you'd—"

He stopped, sprang out of his chair, and walked about the room in such agitation as Roger had never expected to see him display. Presently he regained his self-control, and spoke in his customary cool tone.

"It is always foolish to lose one's grip," he said. "It does not help, and it uses up a lot of useful energy. But in this case I have at least some excuse, for I was partly responsible for the attack on Wells."

"You?" cried Roger in amazement.

"Certainly," Sims answered. "I took what I believed to be adequate steps to protect him, and—I didn't protect him."

"Oh," said Roger; "I see what you mean. But you needn't blame yourself for that. The professor deliberately threw your man off his scent—that's obvious, from what the detective told us."

"Obvious enough," Sims agreed. "And that's just where I was so cursedly stupid. I knew the professor so well. I should have foreseen that he would get sick of being shadowed, and play us some trick like that."

"But you had to protect him somehow."

"Of course; but instead of having him followed about by men he knew, like some tuppeny-ha'penny cabinet minister, I should have put on men he didn't know, and disguised at that, to take no risks, who'd have shadowed him without his knowledge."

"Well, it's done now," said Roger, struck by the bitter self-reproach in the detective's voice. "One can't think of everything, you know."

"Mr. Gregory Marle can, or nearly everything," Sims retorted savagely. "However, it's just possible that even he will get a surprise one of these days!"

"Good enough," cried Roger eagerly. "What's the idea?"

Sims hesitated.

"Of course," began Roger huffily, "if you'd rather not trust us—"

"MY DEAR Kent," Sims interrupted, with that sudden charming smile which always made the professor suspect him most, "my dear Kent, you don't really think that, I know. Let me be quite frank with you. Sometimes it's necessary not to mention things even to the people you trust the most, simply because they may be able to help you better if they only know their own part of the scheme. Do you see my point?"

"No," said Roger bluntly.

"Damn it, you're a hard nut," Sims declared, smiling ruefully. "What I mean is this: when you commanded a battery you didn't ask the battery sergeant-major to clean the mountings of the No. 2 gun, did you?"

"No."

"Of course you didn't, not, mark you, because he couldn't. He would probably have cleaned them most thoroughly. But it would have been a waste of material to employ him on a job like that—quite apart from the question of his rank. You did not waste time in explaining that either to him or to the man who did the cleaning: you just used them in their proper places as a matter of course."

"Go ahead," said Roger, as the detective paused.

"Very well," Sims went on; "what I have to do is to try and fit together the pieces of a pretty complicated jigsaw puzzle, and if I've got to stop and tell each piece why I'm trying him in a certain position, I'll be in my grave before I get the puzzle finished. But that doesn't mean that I don't thoroughly recognize the value of every single piece—"

"That's all right," Roger interrupted, flushing. "I see what you're driving at now."

"Good," said Sims with relief, comfortably satisfied that Roger had not the slightest idea of what he was really driving at. "Now, there's no reason why I should keep you in the dark," he went on. "I'm bound to admit that so far Mr. Marle has taken a trick with almost every card. But there'll be a new deal soon, and I hope to hold a better hand then—even if I have to fake the pack. I don't mind telling you that Marle is much more afraid of Professor Wells than he is of me. Don't think I'm merely trying to show false modesty when I say that he's perfectly right there. Wells ought to have had the credit for a lot of things we've done at the Yard, but he always insists on keeping in the background. But the point is that the acute Mr. Marle was determined to put Wells out of the way first. He may have a go at me presently; that, I suppose, depends on whatever schemes he may have in view. But he regards me, I think, very much as Sherlock Holmes regarded Dr. Watson: a good-natured and industrious fathead."

"I'm sure—" began Peter, but Sims interrupted.

"Now you're going to say something polite," he said, smiling. "Don't worry about my feelings; I haven't got any. The point I want to make is this: the more stupid, or hidebound, Mr. Marle thinks me, the less he will be on his guard against me. Sooner or later he will make a slip—all criminals do, though their slips are sometimes unnoticed.

"Naturally, I'm having him watched. But he'll be clever if he spots the men who are watching him. My game for the moment is to lie low and let him think that with Wells out of the way I'm pretty well stumped. It's a rotten business, I know, having to sit idly waiting for something to happen; but it's a game we have to play a lot of here."

"I SUPPOSE the professor's watch has never turned up?" asked Peter, after a pause during which the two young men digested the detective's explanation.

"No, and it won't, either—at least for some time. It was a good move to steal that watch; it gave a plausible motive for the attack. I'm glad they did it, too. It enabled us to let the matter get into the papers, and make the whole affair look like an ordinary robbery. You can't have a man of Wells' standing knocked on the head without the papers having something to say about it."

"They gave Scotland Yard a pretty nasty swipe about the dangers of London's streets," Peter remarked.

Sims shrugged his shoulders.

"All the better," he said. "Of course, I don't suppose Mr. Marle thinks I'm in any doubt as to the motive, but he may think you fellows are, and that's all to the good. The fact that he hasn't tried to stop Kent from seeing Miss Fayne suggests that he is satisfied that Kent is not in the know. On the other hand, he may be playing a deeper game, and he may think it just as well to have Kent where he can keep an eye on him."

He glanced at his watch.

"Anyhow," he went on, "that does not matter for the moment. I want you fellows to come to the nursing home with me this morning."

"Is the professor worse?" cried Peter.

"No. On the contrary, the doctor has decided that he can be moved today."

"Can we see him?" asked Roger.

"Yes and no. He's bandaged and eye-shaded and all that, but the doctor thinks he'll be better in his own house, since he's so anxious to get out of the nursing home."

"When will he be about again—soon?"

Sims shook his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said gravely. "I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the doctor says he'll have to lie on his back in a dark room for at least two months. I'm not medical enough to be able to give you the technical reasons—he bewildered me a bit with his professional terms—but it appears that the blows of the sandbag hurt the top of Wells' spine. Only for the fact that he was wearing an opera hat, and apparently some of the blows caught the edge of it, Wells would not be alive now. When he was found, the doctors didn't think there was a ghost of a chance for him. But he's certainly round the corner, and as he's fretting to be in his own home it's considered better to move him there, with a nurse to take charge of him."

"You'll have him guarded, of course?"

"Certainly. But I'm afraid it's an empty precaution. You can be pretty sure that Mr. Marle knows he hasn't much to fear from poor Wells for a long time to come. The only comfort we have is that he may presume on that, and take a risk that will give me a chance to get him. But we'd better be going. The doctor won't let Wells see any visitors—even myself—once he's back in Russell Square, and I thought you fellows would like to take this chance of getting just a peep at him today."

IT WAS a silent little party that drove to the nursing home. The professor had been found by a patrolling policeman and taken to the police station, from which he had been removed to a nursing home owned by a doctor personally known both to the scientist and to the inspector. Sims had chosen the doctor because he knew that a discreet hint would enable him to take the precautions he wished, although he had admitted to Roger and Peter that they were little more than a matter of form.

In the hall of the nursing home they waited until an ambulance drove up to the door.

Then, down the wide stairway came a little procession. Two stalwart porters bore carefully a stretcher on which lay a familiar burly figure, the head bandaged and a green shade over the eyes.

As the stretcher halted a moment in the hall, a white hand moved. Roger caught it in his, not trusting himself to speak.

The gray beard moved, and a voice murmured with feeble cheeriness:

"Not dead yet, my lad."

Then the doctor hurried forward, raising a forbidding finger.

Carefully the stretcher was raised, borne slowly across the pavement, and placed in the ambulance.

A passing clergyman paused and lifted his hat with a gesture of sympathy.

The ambulance drove slowly away, Sims' car in front of it, with a uniformed policeman beside the driver to signal to his colleagues on traffic duty.

"A bad case?" asked the benevolent clergyman, addressing a hall porter who stood watching the departure of the ambulance.

"Very bad, sir," replied the porter. "Gentleman 'it on the 'ead and robbed. On 'is back 'e'll be for a coupla months, they say."

"Dear, dear," said the clergyman. "The violence of human beings to each other is a dreadful thing. Let us hope that the poor gentleman will recover, and that his assailants may be caught and punished."

"I'd punish 'em all right, if it was me that caught 'em," replied the porter grimly.

"Yet we must learn to forgive those that do us wrong," said the clergyman gently. "I will pray for them both."

And settling his clerical hat firmly on his head, Mr. Gregory Marle smiled kindly at the hall porter, and went his way. Mr. Marle always preferred to obtain his information at first hand, when circumstances permitted.

CHAPTER XVII

INSPECTOR SIMS refused to talk during the journey to Russell Square. He maintained an obstinate silence until the car stopped outside the professor's house, and said little while the stretcher was carried upstairs under the supervision of a briskly competent trained nurse, who indicated politely but firmly that, estimable as the police might be in their own way, the only authority she recognized was that of the doctor, whose instructions she intended to carry out to the letter.

But when the bedroom door had closed, and when he had had two words with Wells' devoted butler and his wife, the housekeeper, the inspector summoned the two detective-officers he had installed to guard the premises.

His orders were brief, but very much to the point. Night and day those men would maintain in turn a ceaseless watch, a telephone call to the Yard bringing a dozen men to their aid in any emergency.

What had happened once, said Sims, must not happen again; and Roger Kent, listening, felt that neither of those two men would care to look his superior in the face if he failed in his duty. It would be a clever and a daring intruder, indeed, who could escape their vigilance.

Then the inspector looked at his watch, and turned to Peter Felle.

"Now, Felle," he said, "you lily of the field; so far you toiled not, neither did you spin. I've a job of work for you."

"Good enough," replied Peter cheerfully.

"You are, so to speak, my aide-de-camp," the inspector went on. "Now, the first duty of a good A. D. C. is to provide for the material wants of his chief. You may therefore take me out to lunch. Kent, you are off duty, and may vanish. I commend to your notice the bookshops of the neighborhood."

Roger grinned, took his hat, and decamped.

That, Sims reflected, was the strong point of those army men; they did as they were told, without argument.

"Where would you like to go?" asked Peter hospitably. "Frascati's, the Savoy, or would you prefer my club?"

"I want you," said Sims, "to take me to the *Claribel*, and to introduce me to Miss Dene."

"Rather!" said Peter, much cheered. "I'll get a taxi."

"You'll get nothing of the kind, thank you," the detective interposed. "You will come out on the pavement with me, and there you will ask me to lunch with you. I will show a nice hesitation, you will press me, and I will yield gracefully. You will then say that you know a quaint place near here which you want to show me, and I will reply that so long as I get a decent chop I don't care where I eat it. We will then proceed to the *Claribel*. Is that clear?"

"Quite," Peter assured him, and the dialogue ensued accordingly.

PETER looked about him as he spoke, but the only audience of the comedy, so far as he could see, was a seedy person at the curb, who besought him to buy a pair of laces or a box of matches.

"Stop a moment; I want some matches," Sims remarked, and handed a penny to the merchant.

"Got a hawker's license, my man?" he asked.

The match-seller eyed him furtively.

"Yes, guv'nor," he answered with fawning politeness, and pulled a paper from the pocket of his ragged coat. Sims glanced at it, returned it to the man, lit a cigaret with one of the purchased matches, and turned away.

He had not lighted his cigaret very successfully, however, for at the corner of Russell Square he struck another match, turning slightly to face the wind. The match-seller was hurrying down the street in the opposite direction.

"And now for that chop," said Sims cheerfully, and conversed on indifferent matters until they reached the *Claribel*.

The little restaurant was busy. Bessie Marchant's catering and Bel Dene's deft service had found favor in the sight of the people, and already they were able to congratulate themselves on a pleasant margin of profit.

Fortunately there was a vacant table, and Sims and Peter did justice to an excellent meal.

It was a neighborhood in which people took lunch to recruit their energies rather than as a social function. Consequently, as Sims had foreseen, the room began to empty soon after two o'clock, and presently he and Peter Felle were left alone to their coffee and cigarets.

"They know you pretty well here by now, I suppose?" asked the detective.

Peter admitted that he was not exactly a stranger.

"There is, I believe, a Miss Marchant here, who helps Miss Dene?"

"Yes. She hangs out in the cooking and service part of the show."

"Then, my dear Felle, I think it would be a pleasant courtesy on your part to pay your respects presently to Miss Marchant, in the cooking and service part of the show."

Peter stared.

"Previously asking Miss Dene to be kind enough to prevent me from feeling lonely during your absence by taking a cup of this excellent coffee with me," added the detective.

"What's the idea?" Peter demanded in astonishment.

"The idea," replied the inspector gravely, "is that I am a flirtatious person, and I am determined to try and cut you out."

Peter laughed boyishly.

"Damn it all," he said, "you're the coolest bloke I've ever met! No one would ever take you for a detective."

"That's the best compliment you could pay me," smiled the inspector. "Seriously, I want to have a little chat with Miss Dene, and—"

"There's nothing wrong about—about Miss Dene?" put in Peter quickly.

"Nothing at all," Sims assured him.

Peter looked into the steady eyes that met his questioning gaze so frankly.

"Right-o," he said briefly.

SO IT came about that Claribel Dene found herself sitting opposite the detective, every sense alert, but betraying no sign of her mental tension.

Sims wasted no words.

"You know, of course, who I am?" he asked.

She nodded.

"Most people have heard of you," she said.

"I was not fishing," the detective replied, smiling. "I could return the compliment if I wished."

"I'm afraid I don't understand," the girl answered.

"I think you understand very well, Miss—*Dene*," said Sims, emphasizing the name.

The girl's color came and went, but she only shook her head.

"Very well," said Sims. "Perhaps the best proof I can give that I want to help you, not to distress you, is to show you that I know what I am talking about. Your father—"

The girl stopped him with a quick gesture and—although Sims had spoken in a low tone—glanced at the little window in the wall behind them, through which the voices of Bessie Marchant and Peter could be heard.

Sims bowed.

"Very well," he went on, "I need mention no name. Your father was a distinguished man. He held a highly responsible post in the Foreign Office, and he was marked out for still greater distinction. Unhappily, certain State documents which were in his charge disappeared, and were sold to a foreign power."

"My father was innocent," declared the girl proudly.

"I am sure he was," Sims answered, and a softer look crept into the girl's eyes at his words.

"Everybody who knew Sir—who knew your father was certain that he was incapable of disloyalty. But unfortunately he did not realize it. He blamed himself unduly, threw up his post, and disappeared."

"He died," said the girl slowly, "of a broken heart."

"If he had lived," replied the inspector gently, "he would have known that his innocence was established beyond all question—if there had ever been a question of it."

The girl gazed at him, her hand at her breast.

"I need not go into the details now," Sims explained. "Indeed, some of them are bound up with very confidential matters. But I can assure you of this: although the actual thief was never traced, certain facts came to light which proved that your father could not possibly have been concerned in the theft."

The girl's eyes filled with tears, and Sims busied himself in lighting a fresh cigaret, but with admirable courage she regained her composure and smiled.

"I—I am grateful to you for telling me this," she said simply.

"I would have told you before if I had known where to find you," he answered.

"You have not told—anyone else?"

"No one. It was not a matter that could be made public, as you will understand—"

"Oh no; it cannot matter to anybody now—except to me."

"I will only add this," said the detective significantly; "if ever the time should come when you may wish to assure any other person of your father's innocence, you can rely on me to prove it for you beyond all doubt."

Swiftly the rich color flooded the girl's face and neck, but she met his eyes frankly.

"Thank you," she said. "I will remember."

"AND now," the detective went on cheerfully, "tell me about yourself."

"Myself?"

"Yes."

"Why?" she asked smiling faintly. "Is Scotland Yard suspicious of me, then?"

"No. But Scotland Yard is very much interested in you. Indeed, it is because of our inquiries that I was fortunate enough to be able to find you—and so to relieve your mind of some anxiety."

The girl laid her hand on his arm with an impulsive gesture.

"Don't think I'm ungrateful," she said. "But—well, it's so long since I dared to trust anybody—"

Sims smiled and said earnestly: "I think you can trust me."

"Oh, I know I can! I've—I've heard about you." She smiled reminiscently. "I've heard so much about you and Professor Wells."

"Hum!" said the detective. "I'm afraid somebody has been indiscreet."

"Oh no!" cried the girl. "He hasn't said anything except what wonderful people you are!"

Then she blushed hotly as Sims chuckled.

"Come, come, my dear," said the detective, "I'm old enough to be paternal, you know. And I'm not feeling at all wonderful just now."

"I heard about Professor Wells, of course," said Bel. "It's horrible."

"We won't talk about it," said Sims grimly. "Anyhow, he's out of danger now, and of course we shall do our best to catch the man who robbed him."

Bel leaned back in her chair and regarded the inspector thoughtfully.

"Who did it, Mr. Sims?" she asked.

"If I only knew—" sighed the detective innocently.

"I think you know very well," she said.

Sims showed no sign of his surprise.

"That is the worst of enthusiastic amateur assistants," he commented.

"Mr. Felle has said nothing about it, if that's what you mean," the girl replied steadily.

"Then—?"

"Mr. Sims, you know as well as I do that Mr. Marle tried to murder Professor Wells."

The inspector shook the ash from his cigaret.

"Will you tell me just why you think that?" he asked.

"I will tell you a lot of things," answered Bel. "Perhaps you will think they don't matter at all, but you are the best judge of that. Perhaps you know, Mr. Sims, that my mother died when I was twelve. My father and I were great friends; he took me about with him, taught me and talked to me—spared me all the time he could from his work. So I think I grew up quickly. I was almost a woman when most girls are children. I only tell you this to explain why, perhaps, I noticed things that other girls of my age wouldn't have thought about."

"I understand," said Sims, as she paused.

"OF COURSE, my father knew a lot of people," Bel went on. "And except when he had official receptions I used to come down to dinner even when I was quite small. I don't think I was a nuisance; I didn't talk very much; but I used to love listening to the people who came—famous, some of them, and always interesting, for my father was keen on knowing people who mattered, if you see what I mean.

"One of them was Mr. Marle. He knew a lot about India, and my father used to talk to him about the people and their customs, and so on. He liked Mr. Marle, but somehow I never did. I can't tell you why. I just didn't trust him. You know how funny children are: they like people or they don't like them, without being able to give any reason. Anyhow, that's how I felt about Mr. Marle, although he was always very kind to me.

"Well, then the—the scandal happened, and my father left the Foreign Office. That was two years ago. We went into the country, and my father took the name of Dene—that was his second name. We saw almost nobody, and my father wouldn't let his friends know where we had gone. Somehow or other, Mr. Marle found out, and wrote to my father. I don't know what was in the letter, but I know my father was very angry. He didn't say much about it, but one day when we were out for a walk on the moors he suddenly turned to me and said, 'Remember, Bel, never trust that man Marle. You were quite right about him.' I asked him what he meant, and he seemed sorry he had said it. He answered, 'Never mind. It's no good saying things you can't prove.' And that was all.

"Then my father got wet through on one of his lonely tramps over the moors, and was taken ill. The doctor said he could recover if he would only exert himself, but he simply didn't care to live. I could see it plainly enough. And so—so he died."

She paused, but went on again in a moment.

"He left me comfortably off, you know, but I didn't feel I could go back to London and meet the people we used to know. And besides, there was something I wanted to do. You may think it absurd, but I couldn't help thinking that Mr. Marle had known something about the stealing of those documents. For one thing, my father used to talk to him very confidentially sometimes, and I know he trusted him. And then, too, at one time they used to talk a lot about hypnotism and the powers of the Indian fakirs. Somehow I never liked that. It frightened me. You may think that was only natural, but the odd thing is that I was never afraid for myself, but always for my father. I can't quite explain what I mean, but I know the feeling was a very real one to me. I don't know whether Mr. Marle ever hypnotized my father, but I know they sometimes had what Mr. Marle called 'psychic experiments' in the study. I was never allowed in when they had them.

"Then I always thought it was funny that Mr. Marle should have found out where we were living, when my father had taken such care to keep it a secret.

"When my father died, his solicitor settled up his affairs for me. I stayed on at the house in the country for some time, but it was very lonely. Then I came back to London. I had changed a bit—as a girl does in the growing-up stage—and I kept out of the way of people I had known. Besides, people forget you so quickly.

"Then I met Bessie Marchant one day. I'd known her as a little girl. She is an orphan, too, and she had a little money. She had a great idea of starting a place like this, and it seemed to me a jolly idea. I was sick of doing nothing, so I joined her and we started this place. But I must admit I had another idea at the back of my mind. I had never forgotten my father's words about Mr. Marle, and I thought being in London might give me a chance to find out what I could about him. So I went to see him, pretending to ask his advice about starting a business. He was most kind, and introduced me to his ward, Pamela Fayne, the daughter of an officer he had known in India.

"Well, that's about all, Mr. Sims, except that when that man Garcia was murdered, and I began to hear one little thing after another, I began to think that perhaps other people were as much interested in Mr. Marle as I was. Now, I suppose, you'll tell me I'm a silly girl with a head stuffed full of nonsense."

She laughed a little, but her eyes were anxious as she waited for the inspector's reply.

"I SHALL tell you nothing of the sort," Sims replied thoughtfully. "I shall tell you, instead, that I think your head is stuffed full of remarkably good brains. What you have told me is of the greatest importance—greater than you can possibly imagine. But before I go farther, may I ask you one or two questions?"

"Anything you like."

"First, then: have you told anyone else what you have just told me?"

"Not a soul."

"Forgive me if I press you on the point: I want to be quite clear. Have you told anyone about your father's history?"

"No. Bessie Marchant knew something about it, but she has never referred to the subject."

"Does Miss Fayne know?"

"I don't think so. I'm pretty sure she doesn't."

"Or Mr. Felle?"

"No."

"As to your suspicions of Mr. Marle: have you spoken of them to anybody?"

"Nobody. I thought it better to wait until I had something to go on—if I ever had."

"Wise girl. And yet they say a woman can't keep a secret!" he added smiling. "Now tell me this: you are friendly with Miss Fayne?"

"Very friendly."

"And you like her?"

"Very much."

"Well, supposing that Mr. Marle is a thoroughly bad hat—murderer, thief, anything you like—do you think Miss Fayne has any suspicion of the fact?"

"Not the slightest," exclaimed Bel emphatically. "Pamela is a dear, and I'm quite sure that if she suspected Mr. Marle, she wouldn't stay in his house another hour. Mind you, I'm not saying that out of sloppy sentiment. I was quite prepared to suspect Pamela and everybody else in the place—I told you I sometimes feel I can't trust anybody—but I'm absolutely sure she's as straight as a line."

"And Garcia?"

"Garcia was a horror. He was always pestering Pamela, and she ought to have told Mr. Marle about him."

"But supposing—"

She took his point before he made it, with a keenness that surprised him.

"Supposing Garcia was in with him in some way, you mean?" she said. "I thought of that. But Mr. Marle is an extraordinary man. I don't believe he would let anybody hurt or annoy Pamela. You see, he promised her father to look after her, and I will say for him that I believe if he once gave a promise he'd be cut in pieces before he'd break it."

"He's an odd mixture," said the inspector thoughtfully.

"Mixture? He's a devil and a saint in one body—can't you see it in his eyes?" cried the girl vehemently.

Sims nodded gravely.

"Miss Dene," he said, "I begin to think you're a better detective than any of us."

The girl frowned.

"Now you're laughing at me," she protested.

"Indeed I'm not," Sims assured her quickly. "I'm saying that you noticed something that I missed."

"Women see these things, somehow," said Bel, thoughtfully.

"Well," said the detective, "will you lend me those eyes of yours if I want to borrow them presently?"

Her smile answered him.

"Then let us make a pact of conspiracy," he said smiling. "Not a word to anyone about this. And when Mr. Felle asks you what we've been talking all this time—"

"Mr. Felle has no right to ask me anything," she interrupted, chin in air.

"That is exactly why he will ask," explained Sims, and her lips curved to a smile.

"So just tell him that I was cross-examining you about the alleged detective who came to see you the other day."

"And then tell him the truth?" Bel suggested innocently.

"The truth?" Sims repeated, startled.

"Yes—that we found each other so interesting that we forgot all about him," she replied demurely.

Sims rose.

"I am not safe with this forward young woman," he declared to the empty room. "Peter Felle," he cried aloud, "come and take me home!"

THEY were half way down the street when Sims suddenly clapped his hand to his pocket.

"Confound it—left my cigaret case on the table," he explained.

"I'll come with you," said Peter, as the detective turned.

"If you wouldn't mind keeping your eye open for a taxi it would save time," Sims replied. "I shan't be a minute."

"Right-o," Peter responded agreeably.

Back in the shop, Sims beckoned the astonished Bel.

"Tell me," he asked hurriedly, "did you ever hear Mr. Marle say that he had been in Africa—or in the West Indies?"

Bel pondered.

"No," she said at last; "I don't remember his ever saying that."

"Thanks," said the detective. "Good-by."

"But—" she added.

"Eh?"

"I don't know whether it has anything to do with it, but I remember his telling my father some story about an African servant he once had."

"What happened to the servant?"

"He died, I think," Bel answered vaguely.

"Yes—he probably would," said the detective cheerfully. "Thanks very much. Good-by."

CHAPTER XVIII

BACK in his office at Scotland Yard, Inspector Sims sat in a brown study. He was accustomed to navigating strange waters, but the rocks and shoals among which he now found himself might well confuse the most skilful pilot.

Claribel Dene's revelations had moved him profoundly. He had been one of the experts called in when the loss of the Foreign Office documents was discovered, and he remembered the extraordinary skill with which the thief had covered up his tracks. There had been certain clues, indeed, which at first seemed promising; but they had led nowhere.

The ultimate destination of the stolen documents had been obvious. International developments had left the Foreign Office in no doubt on that point, and secret measures had been necessary to counteract the effect of the loss. Fortunately it had been possibie to avert serious consequences, but Scotland Yard had felt keenly their failure both to recover the papers before they had passed out of the country and to lay their hands on the thief. They had been badly beaten. Sims, who never minced matters, admitted it freely.

When he had told Bel Dene that he had only recently learned where she was, he had spoken the truth—but not, perhaps, all the truth. The fact was that when her father had "disappeared" the authorities had tacitly acquiesced in his desire to retreat from the society of his fellows, and had taken no steps to ascertain his whereabouts. In the press of other matters the affair had been forgotten by those who knew of it—and they were few, for the outside public had been allowed to ascribe the statesman's sudden retirement to ill-health.

When, however, the little restaurant to which the girl had given her name had become the object of Mr. Marle's attention, it and its owners had in turn enjoyed the consideration of the police. The machinery of detection was set in motion, with the result that Inspector Sims was not long in learning who Claribel Dene was.

He had long realized that any new viewpoint may reveal an unsuspected aspect of a case, and he went to see Claribel Dene more on principle than with any idea that she could open such an unsuspected vista to his gaze.

One or two points in their conversation had struck him as of particular significance.

"He's a devil and a saint in one body—can't you see it in his eyes?" she had said.

Often and again Sims had heard the phrase "a woman's intuition" derided or approved according to the opinions of its hearers. He did not himself believe that the fact of her sex conferred on a woman the occult power of divination. But experience had convinced him that it is given to some women to reason very swiftly, arriving at conclusions without being conscious of the intervening mental process.

And for such a woman's powers of observation Sims had a profound respect. Himself a trained observer, he knew that there are those who have the faculty of seeing things without being trained to observe them.

Instead, therefore, of dismissing Bel's words with a contemptuous smile, he felt that this young woman might presently prove a valuable weapon in his fight with Gregory Marle.

ANOTHER thing that had at first seemed strange was the fact that since Marle knew Claribel Dene, and could have visited her tea-shop in a friendly way without arousing suspicion, he should have sent an emissary disguised as a detective to search the premises. But on second thought Sims decided that it was characteristic of Marle's methods. In the first place, it was highly probable that the fraud would not be discovered; Bel might easily believe the inquiry a genuine one, and say nothing about it. In the second place, if she were suspicious and reported the matter, he might justly consider the chances a million to one against his own name being associated with the incident.

That brought Sims back to the question of the missing pearls. That they were valuable in themselves he knew from Mr. Morris Baumberg, but apart from their intrinsic value they represented power—for whoever had them in his possession was in a position, not merely to blackmail in the vulgar sense, but to acquire influence over exalted people.

There appeared to be a suggestive coincidence between the theft of documents of international importance from the Foreign Office, and the stealing of the pearls. Marle, it seemed, dealt in important commodities and in many markets.

True, the other people whom he believed to have been victims of the Smiling Death had not appeared to be connected with political organizations. But that, as Sims knew, mattered not at all. The first thing a detective detailed for such work learns is that secret service agents are to be found among the most unlikely people and in the most unlikely circles.

Yet Sims did not believe that Gregory Marle was simply the tool of a foreign power. He had known many such agents, and it seemed to him too circumscribed a rôle for the man who concealed such wide activities beneath the guise of a dealer in books.

There, again, was another indication of Mr. Marle's astuteness. One may suspect a clergyman of embezzlement, an actuary of cheating at cards, a retired admiral of stealing his neighbor's bulbs in the dead of night—but about the trade of a bookseller there is something of the venerable dignity of the first editions he handles, a certain abstraction from the affairs of a hurried world, an innocence in all matters not connected with vellum, calf, fair paper and the variations of type. In all his experience, Sims reflected sardonically, he had never arrested a bookseller.

Whether he was going to arrest one at last was still uncertain. As Wells had said, Mr. Marle had protected himself very cleverly. Chagrined though he was, Sims could not but admit the amazing audacity of the man who not only calmly defied the authorities, but even offered to make terms with them—as one government might offer another—for that was in effect what his offer to Professor Wells had meant.

And how clearly Marle had recognized the strength of his position, Sims reflected. He could have known little of their discoveries for certain, but from what he did know he had reasoned with a logical clarity worthy of the professor himself.

And, for that matter, how little Wells had had to go on. It was, of course, his solution of the cross-word puzzle that confirmed their—

At this point in his reflections Sims sprang up suddenly and walked to and fro rapidly.

Then, reseating himself at his desk, he unlocked a drawer and took out the cardboard box containing, among other things, a check found at Garcia's bank. For some time he worked steadily with pencil and paper. Then he lifted his telephone and gave an order.

In a few minutes his door opened and a thin, spectacled man came in.

"Look at this," said the inspector curtly, pointing to the paper before him.

The handwriting expert bent over his shoulder.

"You can see my notes here," Sims went on. "Now, do you think you could copy out what I have written here, in imitation of the writing on this check?"

"Easily," the expert assured him. "A child could imitate that writing."

"Good. Now, what I want is a cross-word puzzle, squares, numbers and everything—just like this one, but with the clues I have written down here instead of those you see in the original. How soon could you do that?"

Not at all surprised at this cool suggestion that he should commit forgery, the expert considered.

"About an hour," he decided.

"Then start on it at once, will you? It's about as urgent as it can be."

TAKING the papers, the other man went out, and Sims, lighting a cigaret, leaned back in his chair, concentrating his mind on the scheme he had conceived.

Presently his telephone buzzed, and he lifted the receiver with a gesture of annoyance at the interruption.

"What is it?" he demanded. "I don't want to be disturbed about anything unless it's very urgent."

"Agent giving the number Beta Seven asking for you, sir," said the clerk.

Scotland Yard employs many agents in many walks of life, and some of them observe a modest reticence as to their real identity. It was, therefore, not uncommon for Sims to be asked to speak to "Alpha One," "Omega Five," or other odd-sounding appellations. The identity of such agents was known only to the chiefs at the Yard, and even the numbers they used were often changed to avoid the risk of discovery.

But Beta Seven was evidently well known to the detective, for he did not need to refer to the little book in a secret drawer of his desk to refresh his memory.

"Put him through," he said quickly.

For some moments he listened, then spoke rapidly in his turn, but even had the wires been tapped an unauthorized listener could have made neither head nor tail of the conversation, in which neither names nor places were mentioned. It seemed that Sims and his mysterious caller understood each other very well indeed.

Putting the receiver back on its hook, Sims smiled cheerfully, and returned to a consideration of his new plan, knocking off its corners and polishing it until he felt that it had begun to look something like a finished article.

The time slipped by, and before he realized that more than an hour had passed his door opened again, and the expert silently laid a paper before him. Sims took a magnifying glass from his desk, and carefully compared the cross-word puzzle prepared by the expert with the original.

"That's very good, very good indeed," he said, and the expert nodded his appreciation, for Sims did not award his praise lightly.

"Now," said the inspector, "one thing more: sit down, will you, and address this envelope to Mr. Gregory Marle, at this address," and he wrote a line or two on a pad. "Mark it 'Private,'" he added, "and imitate the same writing as you have done on the puzzle."

This job did not take long.

Dismissing the expert, Sims placed the new cross-word puzzle in the addressed envelope, and put both into his pocketbook. Then he took down his telephone again.

"Get me the *Claribel* restaurant in —— street," he directed. "Ask for Miss Dene, and say that a friend wishes to speak to her."

IT WAS not long before he heard the girl's voice.

"Oh, Miss Dene," he said, "this is Inspector Sims speaking. . . . Yes, it's all right . . . to assure you that I really am Sims, I was talking to you today about engaging an African servant. . . . You're satisfied? Good. Well, look here; I rang up to catch you before you left the shop. I want to see you again for a few minutes—it's rather urgent. . . . What? . . . No, not at the *Claribel*, I think. Would it be troubling you too much to ask you to come round to the lounge of the Everyland Hotel? We can talk there without being noticed. Tell Miss Marchant you've got to go up West to buy a *fichu*. . . . You don't wear *fichus?* Of course not; sorry. Well, no doubt you can think of a polite falsehood. . . . You'll come? Splendid . . . yes, as soon as you like. I'll be waiting. Good-by."

Seizing his hat, he ordered a taxi, and was soon sitting among the palms in a discreet corner of the lounge of the great hotel, where thousands of travelers from all over the world arrived, tarried a little while, and departed to the ends of the earth.

He had not wished to meet Bel Dene in the entrance hall, under the eyes of bell-boys and reception clerks, but he kept a keen eye on the entrance to the lounge.

Presently he saw her, and had soon steered her through the archipelago of little tables, at which amorous couples sat late over their tea, family parties chattered of their experiences, and keen looking men smoked foreign cigarets and discussed their affairs.

"This doesn't seem at all the right setting for a meeting of conspirators," said Bel, smiling, as Sims commanded *aperatifs* and produced the inevitable cigarets. "A cellar under the Thames would have been more appropriate."

"Damp," said Sims, "and rats and things about. Still, if you prefer it, of course—"

"I'll have my drink first," Bel decided, as the waiter reappeared. "Seriously, though," she went on, "isn't it rather public here?"

"All the better," Sims assured her. "One is less likely to be noticed in a crowd than in a desert. Anybody that bothers to look at me will simply think I'm making love to you."

"How absurd!" said Bel innocently.

"Take care," Sims retorted, laughing. "If you look at me like that, I may be tempted to try it, and then I'll have to answer to—"

"May I have another light?" Bel interrupted hurriedly. "My cigaret has gone out."

Sims hummed gently a bar or two from "Tea for Two" as he struck a match, and the girl shook her fist at him.

"You're incorrigible," she declared. "But do tell me, what is it you want me to do?"

"I'll tell you in a moment," said the detective. "First, I'm going to give you a very brief account of certain things that have happened, so that you may understand exactly why I'm asking you to help me. And let me remind you that I'm trusting you very completely—even Kent and young Felle don't know everything about this case."

"I understand," the girl answered soberly. "You needn't be afraid of my talking too much."

"I'm not," he replied frankly. "Now, listen—" and in curt, crisp sentences he told the girl of the cross-word puzzle found on Garcia, of its translation and the consequences thereof, and of the search for the pearls stolen from Mr. Morris Baumberg.

"NOW," he went on, "I am going to try an experiment. In this envelope there is a faked cross-word puzzle supposed to have been prepared by Garcia. I want you to take it to Mr. Marle, to whom it is addressed. You will pretend that in looking about the Claribel restaurant you found it among some rubbish, where it had apparently been mislaid—you will see that I have rubbed the envelope on the floor to make it look dirty. You put it aside, but unfortunately forgot all about it until today, and so you bring it to him at once, instead of posting it, so as to apologize for forgetting about it. Is that clear?"

"Quite," said the girl thoughtfully. "But won't Mr. Marle suspect—" she stopped, pondering.

"I don't know what he may or may not suspect," Sims answered. "This is one of those cases in which I must take the risk. But I don't see why he should suspect anything, he knows that you never met Garcia in your life, and it would have been quite possible for Garcia to write this letter and then mislay it."

"But if it is an important letter," objected the girl shrewdly, "would not Garcia have taken very good care not to mislay it?"

"That's a good point," Sims admitted; "in fact, it's the weak link in the chain. But I'm hoping that Marle will believe that Garcia wrote the letter—or puzzle, rather—and intended to send it to him, but thought better of it and left it in the office. Or else that he dropped it, and was killed before he knew that he had lost it. My difficulty is that I don't know enough about the dates—I can only assume them. So I don't know when Garcia actually quarreled with Marle about the pearls."

"I see," said Bel. "Well, if you'll give me the letter, I'll get along."

Sims handed her the envelope, and watched her curiously as she put it into her handbag.

"Do you know that you are a remarkable person?" he said, as she rose.

"Why?"

"Because you have not asked me what message the letter contains."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"You'd have told me if you wanted me to know," she smiled.

"Meaning that I'd have lied to you about it when you asked me, if I didn't want you to know?"

"What a nasty word. I'm sure that, like dear little George Washington, you simply couldn't tell a lie, Mr. Sims. But if other people choose to attribute a wrong meaning to your ingenious explanations, that isn't your fault, is it?"

Sims flushed.

"Our job isn't always a pleasant one," he grumbled, in unaccustomed confusion.

She smiled adorably.

"I'm sure it isn't," she assured him. "And don't think I don't trust you—because I do!"

Before he could reply, she had turned to go, but he caught her quickly by the arm.

"Thanks," he said quietly. "One word more: you and Miss Marchant don't sleep on the premises at the Claribel, do you?"

"No; we've rooms close by."

"Nobody sleeps there?"

"Nobody."

"That's all I wanted to know, thanks."

He saw her to the door, and watched her vanish in the crowded street.

Then he went slowly back to his chair.

"A damn good girl, that," he said thoughtfully. "Waiter! Bring me another gin and Italian, will you?"

CHAPTER XIX

MR. GREGORY MARLE was a firm believer in the truth of the saying that if you want a thing done well you must do it yourself. Nevertheless, there is a limit to the physical powers of any human being—though as to his mental capacity, that is another question—and he was consequently obliged to entrust the execution of at least part of his plans to his lieutenants.

From an artistic point of view, this was a pity. So carefully did Mr. Marle devise his schemes and work out their operation, that had it been possible for him to carry out in person in their entirety, he might have defied detection—or at least conviction—until he died or retired at a ripe age. The ideal criminal is he who works alone, but his very loneliness necessarily restricts his operations.

It was impossible to conduct single-handed such an organization as Mr. Marle had gradually built up—almost despite himself, for in his earlier voyages on the waters of crime he had not foreseen either the measure of his success or the ramifications into which that success was to lead him.

But efficient and powerful as Marle's organization had become, it was controlled by an almost incredibly small number of hands.

Garcia had been the bookseller's right hand man, his chief of staff. Hooky Morgan and Red Joe Smith completed the headquarters of his army—and there were few people indeed outside his headquarters who had ever knowingly met the man who was at once the cleverest criminal and the most polished bookseller in London. And of the few who had been privileged to know him in his former capacity, still fewer had lived long enough to discuss him.

Of course, many pairs of hands—and skilful hands—were needed from time to time to open a safe, to forge a document, to obtain this or that piece of essential information; but their owners were jobmen, each a master of his own branch of the business, usually unknown to each other, and employed as required by Hooky Morgan or Red Joe.

Mr. Marle trusted nobody.

But he considered that it was possible to secure a man's loyalty by reward, by fear, or by a judicious mixture of both—in other words, by appealing to his self-interest.

While, however, it is frequently possible to predict with some accuracy the behavior of a mob in given conditions, it is rarely possible to foresee with certainty the conduct of an individual. The members of a mob are, temporarily at least, swayed by the same overmastering emotion; but one man is the prey of so many conflicting emotions—even when he believes himself to be most single-minded—that he himself is often surprised by his own proceedings.

HOOKY MORGAN and Red Joe Smith were loyal to Mr. Marle chiefly because it paid them to be so. Both had wit enough to see that they could not have devised, much less executed, the plans they helped to carry out. And they were very well aware that while Gregory Marle was quick to reward good service, he was ruthless in punishing the least infraction of the rigid laws by which he governed his organization.

Garcia had known this, too. But Garcia was a man of a different type. He was, by birth and education, what the world calls a gentleman. He possessed, also, a high degree of intelligence united to great personal courage. But he was proud to the point of arrogance, and beneath his affected coolness he concealed the hot passions of the South.

In some ways Marle had found him an ideal lieutenant. His restless disregard of danger, tempered by the caution of coolness, and his resource in an emergency, were qualities which Mr. Marle valued highly.

But the very intelligence which rendered Garcia so much more valuable than Hooky or Red, rendered him also a more difficult tool to handle. Mr. Marle allowed no appeal from his decisions, tolerated no assumption of equality with himself. With Hooky and Joe this superiority was easily maintained, but with Garcia there gradually developed a struggle all the more intense because of its silence.

With many men Gregory Marle would not have been so patient. He would have broken Garcia and tossed him aside like a snapped cane. But he knew how difficult it would be to replace him, and he realized, also, that such a man would be too dangerous an enemy to be allowed freedom to plot against him.

SUCH was the position when Mr. Marle planned the theft of the pearls which Garcia so neatly filched from Mr. Baumberg's office. But the robbery once accomplished, Garcia decided to play a decisive card.

Instead of handing over the pearls to his chief, he retained them, well knowing that it was not merely for their intrinsic value that Mr. Marle coveted them.

Indeed, the theft, though ingenious in its simplicity, was of a more open nature than most of Marle's proceedings, and that fact alone would have shown Garcia the importance Mr. Marle attached to the possession of the pearls.

Garcia, then, having secured the pearls, delivered something of an ultimatum to his chief. He demanded, first, a larger share in the proceeds of future operations; and in the second place he wished no longer to be a subordinate—albeit a trusted one—but a full partner with Marle in all the bookseller's schemes.

Besides his desire for power and wealth, however, Garcia was swayed by another motive. He had long resented the firmness with which Mr. Marle had quietly discouraged his lieutenant's attempts to become more than the most casual acquaintance of Pamela Fayne. As Marle's partner, he felt, it would be impossible thus to keep him at a distance.

Gregory Marle had, indeed, been quite sincere when he told Inspector Sims that he had had no idea that Garcia had pressed his unwelcome attentions on the girl. Had he suspected such a thing, he would certainly not have tolerated Garcia's persecution for a day. But Garcia had been circumspect, and Pamela, as she had said, had not wished to cause her guardian annoyance over what she had concluded was a not uncommon experience of girls who take part in commercial life.

But Garcia's defiance of his chief in the matter of the pearls brought matters to a head.

Gregory Marle more than suspected that Garcia had tested Hooky Morgan and Red Joe as to their allegiance to their common chief. It was, he decided, necessary to assert his authority, both to put Garcia in his place and to warn the other men of the danger of rebellion.

Accordingly, he sent to Garcia—who had kept out of his way after the theft—the warning which Professor Wells had deciphered.

It may be that, granted time for reflection, Garcia would have given way. But Marle gave him no time to reflect—possibly because he felt that even should Garcia submit, he would always be a potential danger.

So Hooky was sent forth on his mission of death.

Garcia, perhaps believing that Mr. Marle valued his services too highly to lose them, took no precautions, and a dart from the deadly blow-pipe ended the earthly career of a man whose abilities fitted him for a nobler end.

ON HOOKY MORGAN and Red Joe Smith this ruthless removal of the man who had dared to defy their chief produced different effects.

To Hooky, whose devotion to Gregory Marle was largely the result of the abject terror of a mean soul, Garcia's fate was well merited. As to his own share in the murder, he had received his orders, and to him Marle's word was law. To have faced Garcia in fair fight would have been impossible to him; but a quick stab in the back, a phial of poison poured swiftly into a coffee-cup, or—best of all—a poisoned dart concealed in a cane: these were means of destruction which appealed to his cowardly malice.

Red Joe, rough criminal though he was, had something of sterner stuff in him—that twisted morality which allowed him to war against society, and yet had made him serve bravely and faithfully in the army that went out to the defense of that society on which he preyed.

While his common sense told him that in Mr. Marle's service he had been better fed and clothed, had enjoyed a greater luxury and a greater sense of security than when he had been his own master, a certain independence in his character rebelled against the old bookseller's iron rule. Had Mr. Marle attempted to win his support by showing even a little confidence in him, instead of contemptuously exacting a blind obedience, he might have made of Red Joe a very loyal servant. As it was, instead of seeing in the murder of Garcia the just punishment of a rebel, Red gloomily regarded it as another manifestation of the ruthless spirit that flings aside the tools no longer useful in carving out its ambition.

Gregory Marle's policy of not allowing his right hand to become acquainted with the doings of his left had its drawbacks. To none of his subordinates was it given to know more than his own share of whatever plan the bookseller had in hand. This, it is true, made it difficult for Mr. Marle's underlings to betray him; but especially in the case of a man like Red Joe, it also meant that no man cared for anything but his own skin. It was hit or miss; if the tool slipped, it might hope for little mercy from the man who wielded it.

While Red Joe sat in his room drinking whisky and reflecting on these things, his chief was knitting his brows over another matter.

IT WAS the evening of the day on which Inspector Sims had met Bel Dene at the Everyland Hotel, and the bookseller held in his hand the cross-word puzzle which, in its closed envelope, the girl had handed to him as soon as a taxicab had taken her from the hotel to the bookseller's house.

A few minutes had been enough for him to decipher the message. It was brief enough. In a terse sentence it expressed Garcia's surrender, and in token of good faith stated that the pearls were hidden beneath a short section of floor board on the right-hand side of the fireplace in the room which Marle knew to be now the eating-room of the *Claribel* restaurant.

Marle studied the slip of paper carefully. It certainly appeared to bear Garcia's handwriting, but the bookseller had seen too many clever forgeries to take that for granted. Supposing, however, the message to be genuine, why had Garcia not sent it in time to avert his own punishment? Had he mislaid it, or had he, after writing it, hardened his heart and decided not to send it after all?

As Sims had foreseen, Mr. Marle did not find it easy to decide the point.

Again, why should Garcia leave the pearls in a place which was to pass into the hands of strangers? But that, Mr. Marle thought, was explainable. Garcia would know that—as, indeed, had happened—Marle would have his own rooms searched; and for the same reason he would not be foolish enough to carry the pearls about with him.

At this point Mr. Marle pulled himself up: he realized that he was allowing his anxiety to recover the pearls to bias his judgment.

The coincidence of the delivery of Garcia's letter by Bel Dene, of all people, had struck him painfully; and yet, he told himself, it was a perfectly natural thing for her, finding a letter addressed to a man whom she had known for years, to deliver it to him personally. She could have no suspicion—and yet . . . that young Kent had been hanging about her shop with Peter Felle.

Mr. Marle gave a sudden exclamation of impatience.

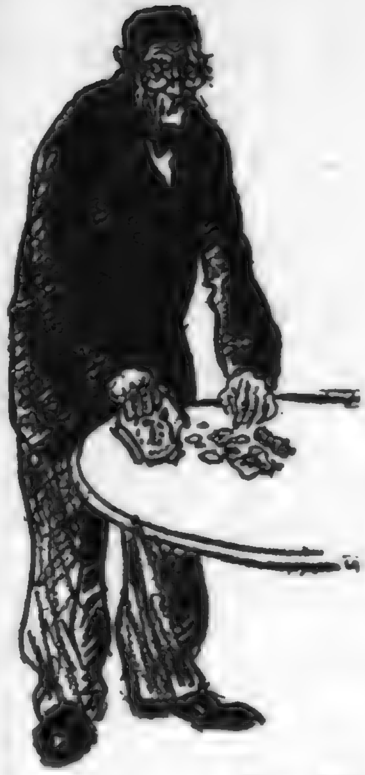
Confound that fellow Garcia—why on earth could he not have been satisfied with the treatment he was getting? It was generous enough, in all conscience. No doubt he thought his chief was getting old and feeble.

Well, he was getting old, and perhaps a shade tired; but he was damned if he was feeble, Mr. Marle told himself, with sudden heat. He'd taught that fellow Wells to mind his own business, anyhow. He hadn't died, it was true, but he'd be on his back for months, and after that it wasn't likely he'd be much inclined to meddle in other people's affairs. On the whole it was just as well he hadn't died: the man was a great scientist, and he wrote devilishly interesting books. So long as he stuck to his science he was all right. If it hadn't been for him, that round-faced, rather stupid Inspector Sims would never have—

Mr. Marle started. Taking up the crossword puzzle again, he examined it carefully. Then, leaning back in his armchair, he sat immovable for nearly half an hour, his brain concentrated on the new line of thought which had suddenly opened before him.

Then, taking his hat, he slipped quietly out of the house and made his way to a public telephone call office. Obtaining a number, he spoke briefly; then emerged from the box, hailed a taxicab, and drove to Soho.

In the following chapters Marle escapes from London, taking Pamela Fayne and Claribel Dene with him.



If you don't like the grimmest sort of humor better skip this one

Johnny MOANER

By GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

HIS name, as entered on the tax-list of Greenwood Center, was John Y. Mariner, but since time out of mind no one through all that New England countryside had called him anything but Johnny Moaner. Once on a time, perhaps, the nickname may have been "Mourner." The old man's habit, however, of moaning slightly though with real sincerity at every funeral for many miles around, had fixed on him the title he now firmly bore.

This world is rich in strange professions. Johnny Moaner's might outrank them all in strangeness—that of funeral-goer. Funerals in the New England hill-country stand high as social diversions; so high that for their sake unused front doors open, yellowed newspapers come up from front-room carpets, front-room shades arise. Even more, liberal feasts bespread tables that for years have known but niggard rations. So, who can wonder that funeral-going holds esteem in rural minds? But with the exception of Johnny Moaner, no one has ever raised it to the dignity of a profession. A profession it was to Johnny Moaner—for his daily bread.

That he "'tended out" on funerals solely for the always concomitant loaves and fishes, everybody knew. The loaves and fishes being usually ham and chicken with "boil-thickened gravy," hot bread, "potato-thump," soggy pale pies, rank coffee, scalding tea so strong that, in country parlance, "it'd hold up an aig."

Yet Johnny Moaner was made always welcome. His stodgy old figure formed as integral a part of any well-conducted obsequies as did the rickety hearse, the shiny coffin, nay, the "remainders" themselves of those who had recently "pegged out." His absence, through six townships, would have cast a damper on the occasion, been a social stigma. Only the poorest of the poor as poverty in a gale o' wind knew that Johnny might not moan their dead. And when hunger pinched him, Johnny favored even these. For half a loaf brilliantly outranks no bread at all.

No bread at all is exactly what, lacking funerals, Johnny Moaner would have eaten. Not that he lacked money. No; a little cash he had, tucked away somewhere and somehow, in his shingle-sided camp up Mount Zircon. Money for his trivial taxes, his celluloid collars and black neckties;

money for—once every few years—a suit of decent black clothes; above all, for his newspapers. But no money for food. Never in the memory of man had Johnny Moaner spent one copper for food. That was his idiosyncrasy, his *tic*. Long ago he had decided that the world of mourning owed him sustenance; and all these many dust-blown summers and blizzard-tortured winters he had been patiently, indomitably collecting it. That was his work in life, his art, in which he was well-pleased and proud. He toiled at it as conscientiously as other men till farms, build bridges, write books or sell suspenders.

FOR that purpose, all the newspapers in many miles around came regularly to his R. F. D. box down where his hill-road joined the Sutton turnpike. You know that breed of papers—big, smearily-printed sheets filled with boiler-plate features, among which intruded items about Ladies' Aids, King's Daughters, local haps and mishaps, and who had Sunday'd with whom. Every day Johnny Moaner would carry two or three such papers up to his foodless little shack, where all these years he had lived sole alone.

Every night by the gleam of a glass lamp he would perch steel-bowed glasses on his nose and with an air of surety read not only all the obituaries, but would also hopefully consider every item of accident and sickness. He possessed not alone an eye for accomplished facts, did Johnny Moaner, but in addition had a foreseeing glance akin to that of Brother Buzzard sitting on a Virginia fence-rail while old Dobbin dies. This buzzard-resemblance was heightened by the ruddy baldness of his head and neck below the black sateen skull-cap he always wore, and by certain bristles protruding from that baldness.

"Humph!" he would grunt, toothlessly, fixing the item with a black-rimmed finger. He never wore his teeth except at funerals, carrying these "upper 'n' unders" neatly wrapped with a clean bandanna in his pocket; putting them in at the scene of operations and always removing them when decently far away, home-bound. Why, after all, wear out one's teeth when not in use? "Humph! That cropin' Simmy Brackett—he's gone, over to Bowker's Mills. Ben sick in his naked bed 'most three months, Simmy has. An' old Miss Jepson, down to the Center, I see she's laid low an' out of her misery. Ben dretful slim, ever since wheelin'-time. The both o' them funerals comes Thursday. But I can make out to git to 'em both, if I huck it spry.

"An' here's Uncle Trumett Bryant, mortial low with the peumonia. Had a power o' grief, Uncle Trumett has. I think it's a doubt if he'll stand it a gret sight longer. Mebbe they'll funeralize him by Sat'day. They'll victual lickin' good to his place. Thar'll be all kinds o' chicken-fixin's, you can bet y'r boots an' resk it. If I can git me suthin' fer Sunday, it'll be a master good week, after all. Things looked kinda pindlin', fust o' the week, but they're pickin' up fine, now. 'Course, 'tain't like them there flu times, but nemmind! It's pretty fair-to-middlin'. *I* ain't got no call to kick!"

TO JOHNNY MOANER, the war-time epidemic of flu had been an epoch flowing with milk and honey, a Land of Cocaigne, a paradisiacal time of plenty. Old Johnny had gained more than fifteen pounds. His stark bones had clothed themselves with unaccustomed rotundities. "He's gittin' fatter'n a settled minister," people had remarked. No day but had brought him at least two funerals. Many had offered three, five, even more. Johnny Moaner had been able to choose with the fine air of a gourmet; had suffered from a downright embarrassment of choice. But he had selected astutely, like a connoisseur. Never before or since had he trudged so few miles for such rich pickings.

"Wun't never be no sech times as them, agin, by Godfrey dorman!" he would reminiscently sigh, drumming on his knee with a powerful, leathery hand mottled by brown patches. "That is, without some other fust-class epidemic gits a-runnin' good. But with all these here 'tarnal seerums an' unnat'ral, God-defyin' contraptions, nowdays, the all-fired doctors 'most allus heads 'em off, sure as shootin', afore they can git a good, runnin' start. Plumb wicked an' flyin' in the face o' Providence, I calls it!" By which you shall discern that Johnny Moaner was not lacking in a certain sense of ethics; and that he walked righteously among his fellows as one who owed no man, paid his way, and (whether or not acquainted with the late lamented) felt himself ever welcome in all houses of affliction—as indeed he was.

Welcome, yes. Always decorous, invariably neat and self-effacing, his presence soothed, comforted. He never failed of a few sympathetic words to the bereaved. Never thrust himself forward, but was content with an obscure corner at the services. Never manifested greed at the funereal table. Johnny Moaner always liked the fare, ate without asking for a second help, never put anything in his pockets to take home—as betimes some less scrupulous guests did—; and, if asked, never balked at going to the cemetery, even in the severest weather. He always aimed to give value received, in full.

A good, reliable mourner, all in all he was one who could be counted on, rain or shine; a credit to any grieving company. More, he constituted a news-bulletin to the inquiring, who took perhaps only one paper. Not that he ever volunteered any information; but, if people inquired, he would in a few words give knowledge of actual or prospective deaths, reliable data on illness, all over six townships. And among the dwindling native population of New England, a dying race, such matters bulk large. His peregrinations, sometimes amounting to thirty miles a day, put him in touch with horizons wider far than those of his less-travelled neighbors.

Such, peering from windows (as country folk in New England peer), might in any season behold him plodding patiently onward. That square-cut figure with the slouched felt hat jammed over the black skull-cap—a figure always with stout stick in hand, heavy brass watch-chain dangling, celluloid collar and black tie with brassy stick-pin, huge and blunt-toed boots treading dust or snow or mud—invariably meant that somewhere in the countryside the Angel of Death had paused and passed.

SUMMERTIMES, on endless sweltering roads under their Gothic arch of elms, Johnny Moaner's loose-hung coat of black alpaca would be dust-whitened. Winters, down drifted highways beneath naked and gale-whipped boughs, his overcoat of black would be whitened even more, with driven snow. But ever funeralward, or back home again, invincibly he trudged. And it would be—

"I vowny, Luell', if thar don't go Johnny Moaner, pudgin' along! Somebody's dead as hay, fer sartain. Who's ben took now, over Bethel way, I'd like fer to know?" Or—

"What's Johnny Moaner hyperin' to'ards Hampden fer, Zack? You don't cal'late old Malachi Pratt's failed up an' quit, do ye?" Or maybe—

"I seen Johnny Moaner dobbin' along like all git-out, over Billin's Hill, this mornin' in the rain. I snum, Hod Newry must be death-struck—him as ben goin' back all spring with the chronical rheumatiz!"

Small wonder that people keenly watched one whose passing-by always bore such grim significance! Small wonder that some feared, while others longed for, sight of him! (City folk are not the only ones with whom matters of heritage sometimes weigh heavy.) And Johnny Moaner, Death's messenger, likewise assumed import as one of superior education. The more so as innumerable eulogies had enriched his vocabulary so that, when he chose, he could soar to no mean rhetorical heights.

He had, in fine, through stress of professional circumstances become a sort of ambulatory and bucolic Associated Press. The six townships deferred to Johnny Moaner. But none could pay him for information, with meat or drink, in any house save where lay the dead. Every non-mourning invitation to "come in, set, an' make long arms"—which means partake of victuals—he soberly declined. No; funeral baked meats were Johnny Moaner's "specialsty." Nothing could tempt him to deviate from the path of strict professional rectitude. Why deviate? Did not a reasonable plenty ever await him in the strait and mourning way?

True, he sometimes had to fast a day or two; but by the law of compensation he often got two or even three meals close together, following such deprivation. And one square meal, on the average, sufficed him. Thus had he trained himself to live. Laws of the Medes and Persians held no more inflexibility than that law which, through some psychic oddity, he had developed.

So had he lived, this many a year. So, barring accident, he might have gone straight to the inevitable hour when certain of his neighbors, gathering at his shack, would for the first time in their local history have found no feast awaiting in a house of death.

AN ACCIDENT, however, a quip of spiteful destiny at length thrust its rude way into the funereal tenor of his own. There finally came to Johnny Moaner, as to nearly all mankind, a day of sore affliction. A day when manna ceased to fall; when loaves and fishes failed; when gaunt starvation stared him eye to eye and anguish threatened.

It happened in this wise. One summer, a period of most inexplicable and distressing vitality afflicted the broad townships that constituted his happy hunting-ground. Greenwood Center, Sutton, Bowker's Mills, Hampden, Bethel and Zircon all remained unbrushed by the Death Angel's wing. It is a fact that Johnny Moaner found the total sickness encouragingly normal. But no one died. The fruit ripened, but would not fall. Only prospects offered. And who can live on prospects?

For three anxious days, Johnny Moaner subsisted merely on hot water and hope. For three days he sat alone in his little shingled hut on the mountain road, reading his boiler-plate country papers, without finding a single obituary. Pangs of hunger assailed him. Hopefully he scrutinized the "Personals," "Jottings," "Flashes." He mused:

"Jeems Rice, but this here's cur'ous, I'm consarned if it ain't! I never see the beat on't, never. Any God's a-mint o' sick folks, but nobody dyin'. Thar's lots of outs about it, but by the Gret Deludian, the jam's bound fer to haul afore tomorrer. Slower 'n jillpokes is what they is, but somebody's *got* to peg out. An' after that, it's only two or three days, or some sech a matter, 'fore thar'll be a funeral somewheres!"

Through his steel-bowed glassed he studied, so to speak, his stock market.

"Thar's old Linus Presbrey, over to Bethel Village. Bethel *Clarion*, here, says he's had his third capuluptic shock, an' is sinkin' fast. He can't live, no way in this world. An' thar's Anne Melissy Piper, down to Sutton Crossroads. Heart-spells, very bad off. How's she goin' to git along, by gary, more 'n a day or so? An'," as he took up another paper, "here's that Tibbetts boy as got cut so jeroozly bad on the buzz-saw, to Hampden Pond, last Monday. He ain't got no nameable chanst. That makes three of 'em, don't it? I'll make out to git me a meal o' victuals pretty soon. Oh, *I'll* be all a-hunky! If I don't git to at least one mournin', afore Sunday, I miss my guess. *I* ain't got no call to worry, none, you can bet an' resk it!"

ALAS for human predictions! He missed his guess, entirely. "The best-laid plans of mice and men . . ." Old Linus Presbrey, for all his four-and-eighty years and his three shocks, obstinately refused to perish. Anne Melissy Piper's defective cardiac apparatus still tantalizingly continued to function. And as if inspired by very devils of perversity, the mutilated sawmill-hand not only lived along, but had the effrontery to take a turn for the better.

Wherefore, on the next day—having learned these evil tidings—Johnny Moaner moaned, indeed. He felt the hand of unjust fate fall heavy on him.

The day following, a bit "ga'nted" and pale, but with principles unshaken, he took his stick and tramped down the wood-road to his R. F. D. box, garnered his sheaf of papers and started the long, weary grind home again. But famine was now at so insistent a stride and the weakness of his knees was such that he had to rest along the way. Might as well see, now as later, what fish, if any, destiny had fetched unto his net.

Sitting on a moss-cushioned boulder under a smooth-barked beech, he donned spectacles and with dismay read some of the most distressing news that ever had afflicted him. No one had given up the ghost. No deaths!

Rebidee Littlefield, dying with cancer of the stomach and not long for this world, still survived at Zircon Corners. Little Myra Brickett, almost a sure "chance" at Greenwood, was reported holding her own. Aunt Olive Dorset, of Rocky Ridge, was still obstinately fighting for life against the "tubbucolosis" that by all rights should long ago have finished her. Worst of all, Anse Bidwell, who had broken his neck in a fall from a barn at Bowker's Mills and had been thought *in extremis*, was now lying in a plaster cast at Keeneville Memorial Hospital and was thought to have a battling prospect.

"BY THE Gret Horn Spoon!" tremulously ejaculated Johnny Moaner, this being extreme profanity according to his pious standards. For be it known that Johnny Moaner was a deeply religious man. He made no boast of it and never attended church, that being rather supererogatory in view of his many funerals. But none the less his piety was profound. So too, his goodness. He lived a simple and a blameless life, did ill to no man, did perhaps a little good. He always read his Bible half an hour every night—after the obituaries—and asked God only one favor: "Give us this day our daily bread." Which was to say: "Send at least one death, daily, into my six townships!" And yet now, now—

"By the Gret Horn Spoon, but this is suthin' pretty desprit! It cert'nly does strike a dread to me, an' don't ye doubt it. I vowny but I *am* took down a peg. Who could of thunk a thing like this 'd happen?"

He pondered a while, then got up and—leaning heavily on his stick—dragged himself in black dejection up to his cabin there among the hills.

Home again, the old man drank some more hot water and sat him down to think. Until the morrow, no hope of respite could arrive. Clem Parsons, the R. F. D. man, came only once a day. Another four-and-twenty hours must elapse before a new batch of papers might bring news of possible pickings. And the pain in Johnny Moaner's vitals was consuming him. An extraordinary weakness had likewise come upon his flesh. Panic fingered at his heartstrings.

"My land o' livin', but I'm plumb tuckered," he groaned. "Things looks mighty dubrous, fer a fact. *I* never had no sech hard sleddin', afore. What—what if I got so took down that if thar come a funeral, an' it happened to be fur off, I couldn't git to it? What'd I do, *then?*"

Johnny Moaner paced the bare-scrubbed floor of his little cabin, and for the first time in all his life felt the stern grip of a terror that shook his soul. For the first time he entertained fugacious doubts as to God's provident care.

"The Lord 'll pervide," he told himself. "He allus has, an' allus will!"

Yes, but might not the Lord take a bit of a nap, and overlook him? Too long a nap, and where would Johnny Moaner go? Appalled, he moaned in very earnest.

A SUDDEN thought arrested him. He turned, opened a cupboard with a key fumbled from the cupboardtop, and took down a spoutless, cracked and very ancient china teapot. Thence he shook the contents on his table ever innocent of food. Copper, silver, a few tight-folded bills—yes, the wherewithal to stay his pangs. Johnny Moaner with gnarled fingers poked his little hoard. Only a two-mile walk to Crosbury's store, at Zircon Center, and—but Johnny shuddered and drew back.

"Consarned if I will!" he growled. "This here's an awful quand'y I'm into, but I ain't fell so low as *that.* I'll come up amongst the missin', fust, an' done with it. S'help my God!"

In this he was entirely sincere. Who can fully fathom human motivation? Who can wholly plumb either baseness or heroism? Principles outweigh acts. They determine both what the world calls "good" and "evil." Ask a saint to abandon his worship, a sybarite his hedonism, a head-hunter his trophy, and in each case you get a similar reaction. Your successful yeggman, if exhorted to go straight, clings to his traditions with a grip as firm as your eminent physician who loses his life attending a negro pauper. Your true amateur sportsman will not besoil himself with any taint of professionalism. The *idée fixe* dominates. Gladly men die for it. So, now, with Johnny Moaner.

"I'm starved fit to eat the Lord's supper, but I ain't bought a bite o' victuals, these more 'n forty-seven years," he said defiantly, in a voice harsh and tense. "What's more, I never will. I'd ruther be kicked to death by cripples, fust. God has allus pervided fer me, an' I cackelate He will, now. In Him do I place my trust, the Rock o' my salvation!"

Sweeping up the handful of money, scornfully as if it had been thirty pieces of silver, Johnny Moaner thrust it back into the white china teapot.

"Oh, ye of little faith!" he exclaimed, as he once more locked it in his cupboard. "Git thee behind me, Satan!"

JOHNNY MOANER adjusted his black sateen skull-cap, which had fallen somewhat awry, and sat him down to think. It was hard to think, with that insistent gnawing at his vitals, that vertigo of weakness assailing his sinews. But he forced himself to reason out this matter.

"Yes, sir, somebody's jest natchally bound fer to be took by tomorrer, anyhow. 'Twould be against nature, if somebody didn't pindle out an' quit. An' if they do, thar'll be a funeral two or three days later. Hard fodder, but I can prob'ly make out to stan' it, somehow, till then." In his heart of hearts, he knew he could not. Three, perhaps four, days more of this might finish him—might so weaken him that he could never drag himself weary miles to the mourning feast. Still, as men do in desperate crises, he grasped at self-conviction. "By the livin' laws, I can still git to it—if it ain't too fur, I—I'll git through this here, some way. *I* ain't a-scared!"

Yet in his soul he felt the clawings of a terror that annihilated.

Evening fell. Sun sank behind forested shoulders of Mount Zircon. Shadows crept from cabin corners, crowding Johnny Moaner. He made a little fire—for hot water he must have—and lighted one of his two glass lamps. No principle was involved in burning kerosene. He had always paid cash for that, for clothes, newspapers, other necessities. Had he been a smoker, which he was not—his dictum being: "I can't see Christ an' tobacker goin' together, nohow!"—he would have bought tobacco, too. Food, only food, was tabu for purchase. So now the burning of his lamp left him untroubled.

He needed his lamp this evening, if ever in his whole existence. Never had he felt greater necessity for light. Perhaps, after all, he had made some error, overlooked some prospect. In all those papers, surely he must discover something. One by one, with jealous care, he combed them fine.

Nothing.

Carefully he folded them and put them all away. Then he drank some more hot water, and fetched down his much-read Bible from the shelf where stood his other lamp with a paper bag inverted over its spotless chimney. On that shelf, wrapped in a clean bandanna, he also kept his teeth. But now the teeth had become a secondary consideration. The Bible came first. Surely the Bible would have some message for him. With it upon his knees he sat a moment, pondering.

Lamplight cast harsh shadows over his face, hewn on broad planes as by a woodsman's adze. Under the black cap, sparse gray wisps of hair projected past the tops of his ears, ears loose, large, sprinkled with whitish bristles. His forehead, deep-lined and square, showed the same brown patches that here or there maculated his rather sunken, lax-baggy cheeks descending into wattles below the rugged and unshaven chin. Stiff-bushed eyebrows of gray overhung pale, greenish eyes that, slightly "walled," showed white rims between the pupil and the lower lid. His nose, wide-based and beaky, dominated lips formless and oddly purpled at the corners. An extraordinary face that was, primitive yet not unkindly; a medieval old face, such as Franz Hals or Holbein would have loved. The face, withal, of one who goes to gallows or to fagots immutably, for conscience' sake.

"Le's see, now," Johnny Moaner spoke, and opened up his Bible. "Le's see what the Book's got to say about this, now, by crimus!"

THE Book opened to Nehemiah, VII. He read:

"The children of Elam, a thousand two hundred fifty and four. The children of Zattu, eight hundred forty and five. The children of Zazzai—"

He closed it.

"Humph! Them old partriarchs was master-hands to have big fam'lies, wasn't they? Wonder how they made out to keep 'em all in victuals? Well—I can't see's this here applies to me, over 'n' above. I got fer to give it another try."

The second try, however, yielded only:

"And over the olive trees and the sycamore trees that were in the low plains was Baal-hanan the Gederite, and over the cellars of oil was Joash."

"*Humph!*" Again the Book slapped shut.

The oracle seemed spurning his advances, so he sought comfort where well he knew it lay—in the Twenty-third Psalm. His loose lips moved slightly as he conned the old, familiar promises—

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures; He leadeth me beside the still waters . . . Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me . . . Thou preparest a table before me . . . My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

Then he fell silent, brooding; and presently he smiled.

"That 'd oughta be good enough fer

anybody, by gull! Reckon it hits my case, mighty nigh. An' I know some more good verses, too." He turned to the Twenty-seventh Psalm and read: "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread."

He nodded.

"Yes, sirree, that sounds good! Them's the Lord's own words, I cackelate. 'I have been young and now am old.' That's me. An' I'm amongst the righteous. Ain't no two ways about it. So then, how can I be forsaken? I jest plumb can't! I'll bet two fingers on the choppin'-block an' resk it! 'Twould be plumb con-*trary* to God's will. An' thar can't be nothin' con-*trary* to that!"

He thumbed the well-worn pages, found and studied:

"The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing." And he murmured: "Well, reckon I ain't no young lion, but anyhow I seek the Lord, an' He'll see me through, some ways another. That's flat. I'm all beat out, jest now. Things looks like kind o' hard fodder fer me, but I got faith. God 'll send me my meat or show me how to git it. The ravens do want; the young lion roar an' cry for food, an' He sendeth them their meat in due season—or however it goes. Faith, yes sirree, I got faith. An' faith—with works—will git me through!"

A smile slightly curved his loose and purpled lips. He shoved back the steel-bowed glasses, up toward the tight black skull-cap of sateen. Replacing his Bible on its shelf, he drank still another cup of hot water. Then he blew out his lamp and sat down again to ponder. For pondering, darkness sufficed. Why, after all, waste kerosene?

SITTING alone in gloom, beside his foodless table, he let thoughts wander far across his bailiwick of the now unproductive six townships. From farm to hamlet they drifted, from homestead to village. Then, wandering back again, they paused on old Rebidee Littlefield at Zircon Corners, only three miles away.

"It ain't right," he presently remarked. "That despiseable old rapscallion, livin' on an' on. When, if he was took, thar'd be a fine, fust-class funeral. Best thar's ben round this neighborhood in years an' years, I reckon. Him, livin' along, the ungodly old hussian, as had oughta ben gibbeted long ago! Me, a man o' faith, dyin' here by inches, 'cause he keeps livin'! An' him without no nameable show, invitally sick with a cancer! Only kept under dope, all the time, or he couldn't stand the sufferin'. Him, nigh on to eighty-nine years old! Livin' on borrered time, as you might say. All is, 'tain't just ner right, no way in this here world!"

He sat thinking about Rebidee Littlefield and the life old Rebidee had lived—a hard, pinching, penurious life filled with sharp practices, extortions, cruelties to man and beast, to wife, children, neighbors, everybody. He reviewed how Rebidee had once been arrested and fined for having starved his live-stock till some had died; again, for having broken the jaw of a calf that had refused to drink milk from a bucket when Reb had tried to wean it.

"Twisted its jaw plumb round an' busted it, so's it hung down all lopsywise," murmured Johnny Moaner. "Rim-racked an' abused his wife like a hoss, an' never give her one red cent. An' all the rest of it. Enough, by Jo Beeswax, I should say!"

Mentally he reviewed the Littlefield-Brackett "lawin'," when through litigation and bribery old Reb had cheated Hiram Brackett out of the Stony Creek "interval," or meadow; the suspicion that many years ago had fallen on Rebidee, of having burned his house for the insurance-money; the veteran's pension that—though accused of having really been a deserter—Rebidee had, these many decades, drawn from Uncle Sam; the cold cruelty that had driven Rebidee's wife into the Burrington Insane Asylum and had sent his children forth into the world with hatred in their hearts.

"He's ben a hard, ornery, ungodly man, old Reb Littlefield has," muttered Johnny Moaner. "An' I ben a good, God-fearin' one. Yet now, all on account o' him I'm chock-a-block full o' misery an' can't spin a thread. Jest 'cause he wun't die, I'll mebbe hafta! Is that God's will, I'd like fer to know?"

ANOTHER incident welled up in the deep pool of Johnny Moaner's thoughts. The incident of old Lucinda Bidwell's widowhood and of how Reb Littlefield had profited thereby. Silas Bidwell, after many years of brutally mistreating his frail wisp of a wife—who on their rocky hill-farm had borne with his vituperation, drunkenness, infidelity, and still had worshipped him—Silas Bidwell, forsooth, had at long last found the good grace to make way with his own worthless life.

Tarred with too foul a scandal, Silas had "went to Hell a-blazin'." One dour November day of freezing sleet he had unhooked his shot-gun from the ox-horns in the kitchen, had gone out into the "east mowin'-lot" and there had undressed his right foot. Then, laying himself down upon the frozen earth, he had put the gun-muzzle into his mouth and pulled the trigger with his toe. Results had been particularly devastating.

And old Lucinda, gasping, sobbing, had run more than a mile down the hill-road, to Reb Littlefield's. Livid and shaken by cosmic horror, grief, agony, she had begged Littlefield to carry her to town, for Doc Stewart. Might there not still be hope her husband was not really dead?

"Sartain sure, Lucindy, I'll hook up an' carry ye," Reb had drawled, a calculant gleam in his eye. He had forthwith hooked up and taken her to Dr. Stewart, on her fruitless errand of bereavement. But—"That'll cost ye a dollar an' a quarter, seein' it's you. Anybody else, it'd be one-fifty."

Littlefield had collected the dollar and a quarter, too, in small change. And thereafter, many a slave-driving year, he had given her Christian charity in her poverty-gnawed widowhood, by having hired her weak hands to hoe and weed his fields, milk cows, clean stables—at ten cents an hour. Good business, for old Rebidee!

Now, thinking of this and vastly more, Johnny Moaner set his toothless jaws a little harder.

"'Twan't even a good funeral, there to Bidwell's," he muttered, nursing another grievance. "Not even a skrid o' ham or chicken. Nubbut beans an' sody-biscuit an' tea. An' old Reb's sure been tough an' rugged with Lucindy, in a little million o' ways, all these years. Part o' his money come from that, an' how he lawed them thirty-acres o' spruce away from her. But he ain't never got his come-uppance fer it. An' now he's still livin' on an' on, 'spite of all his sins. Him, with a cancer, as ain't got no nameable chanst to git well. An' me all weewaw with starvation! Is that God's jestice, I'm askin' you?"

MOON arose, serenely broad and yellow, over the up-thrust shoulder of Mount Zircon, and through the cabin door painted a vague ribbon of light. Somewhere in the black forest, a whip-poor-will fluted its insistent note, that in New England—to so many minds—harbingers approaching death. Old Johnny Moaner sat with hands on knees, staring at the moonlight. But he was seeing more than that. With his mind's eye he was beholding Rebidee Littlefield's house, down there at Zircon Corners, just at the turn of the Bethel Hill road.

There in that dilapidated house which Reb had long left unpainted and with falling clapboards, so as to lower his tax-rate, the old miser was inevitably dying. There, in a stark and barren room of death, the final shadows of eternity would soon—in a week, a fortnight—enfold the flint-hearted beast who had been more than a brute and now was less than a man. The room, Johnny Moaner well knew, was in an ell at the right of the house, next the lonely road. Even though old Rebidee could no longer reach that road, would nevermore—save in his shoddy coffin—travel its dusty length, he had chosen to lie where he could still watch what life yet, in the perishing community, passed by.

The window of that room, Johnny Moaner knew, would be open. No lamp would be burning there. Only moonlight would be dimly shining there. Rebidee, insensible with morphine, would be lying all alone. Upstairs, his old-maid daughter Tirza Jane—the only one who, even for his property, had been able to stand by him—would be a-snoring.

The *mise en scène* was perfect for an act not only of self-preservation but of simple, God-sent justice.

Johnny Moaner raised his hands. In the aureate moonlight he studied them. He flexed the knotty fingers. Strong, yes; despite all his long fasting, those fingers still were strong. Johnny Moaner smiled with purple, flaccid lips.

"It says in the Book," he murmured, "it says fast an' pray. Well, ain't I fasted till I'm a'most dead? I'll pray, now. Le's see what God 'll tell me 's the right an' proper thing to do. Le's see how much the life of a righteous man is wuth to God. When it comes to advice, I reckon I can trust to Him!"

He knelt beside his chair, and for ten minutes in the slowly-shifting ribbon of moonlight wrestled in prayer with the spirit. When he arose, he still was smiling.

With a glad heart, a conscience pure of sin, he squinted at the vague little blotch of darkness on his shelf, made by the bandanna that contained his teeth. He nodded.

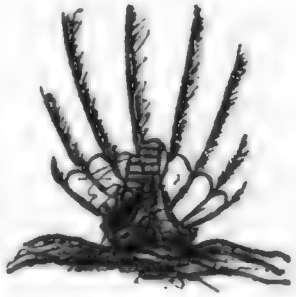
"Cackelate I'll soon be usin' you agin, 'fore long," he opined. "Can't be none too soon fer *me!*"

THEN he put on his hat, took his stick and left the cabin. A dark shape among the shadows clotted down the mountain road, he slowly moved. Somewhere amid blacker deeps of spruce and pine the whip-poor-will's clear-throated piping rose to the golden disk of moon.

As funerals go, in Zircon Corners, old Rebidee Littlefield's funeral was a success. Parson Luther Simpson, avoiding personalities, extended reasonable hopes for Rebidee's future state. He also feelingly mentioned the blest relief from pain that God had given "our departed brother." A good, average attendance turned out, and the dinner proved satisfactory.

Johnny Moaner, though looking rather "pickid," moaned at the services perhaps even a little more devoutly than usual. He also worked havoc among the victuals—"budded right in an' cut a pow'ful wide swath, fer an old feller," folks said. Moreover, for the first time in history, he pocketed some food and took it home with him. But none said him nay, to that. None "begretched" the good old man.

His smile, some noticed as he started back toward his cabin up among the hills, was that of a man at peace with all the world, with his own soul and with his God.



A Complete Novelette

SENTIMENT sometimes plays a small part in modern ocean commerce, but a dead loss of several hundreds of dollars a month was carrying sentiment too far. Thus reasoned Elwood Page, owner of the Page Shipping Company, of San Francisco. Thirty years before, the *Elwood Page*, a clipper-bottomed, four-topmast schooner of seven hundred tons, had been the pride of the company—the largest craft of her rig on the coast. But now her owner had decided, sentiment notwithstanding, to lay up the vessel and let her rot on the mudflats of Oakland Creek. And to this effect he had sent a note to Captain Gus Holm, the schooner's master.

Captain Holm had lived fifty-eight years, and had spent forty-two of them at sea. His white hair and mustache were long. So was his weather-reddened face, after receiving the terse announcement from Page. He tore up the note, slowly, mechanically, and then cast the bits of paper to leeward as if he were casting away a blight that had threatened to overtake him.

"It ain't right!" he muttered, spitting with a discouraged fluidity toward the poop rail. The shot fell short; half a gill of tobacco juice splashed upon the immaculate deck. But such was his dejection that even this self-committed sacrilege failed to move him to profanity. He looked as forlorn as a pup that had just been kicked through a once friendly doorway.

Morosely his gaze wandered out across the dirty pea soup colored waters of San Francisco Bay and centered on the rusty red side of a tramp steamer lying at anchor. The sour gaze turned to one of anger, and if concentrated malice could have accomplished it the unoffending steamer would right then and there have been torpedoed amidships, for Captain Holm regarded her as typical of the new order of things that had at last taken away his home and his job.

To be sure, he had another home; a rose-covered bungalow in Bayview, across the bay, near Oakland, where dwelt his wife and his five sturdy youngsters. But for years he had regarded the schooner as his real home, the one place where he could be himself. He rated himself as a total loss when staying between voyages at Bayview for there he lived under more or less of a strain. If he swore, even mildly, he was setting a bad example for the children; if he

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Introduces a Most Lovable
Old Sea Captain in

It Ain't RIGHT

smoked he spoiled the curtains and rugs; if he chewed to avoid these evils he was crude. What chance had a man to enjoy himself?

Captain Holm thought of these things, and sighed.

"It ain't right," he repeated heavily. "Ol' man Page is bilgin' me proper, forcin' me into a life like that." Another sigh. He thought of the exceedingly friendly relations which thirty years of association had built up between himself and his employer. "I'll bet this is just another dodge of his to try to force me into steam. I won't do it. I'll tell him that for the last time." Captain Holm prepared to go ashore.

HALF an hour later found him in Steuart Street, in San Francisco, gazing distastefully up at the tall office building which had replaced the two-story shack that had served to house the Page Shipping Company for several years after the great fire. Holm didn't like that office building; it was too high, too typical of the progress at which he looked askance. "The old things are the best!" was Holm's religion. Elevators? He scorned them, and, perhaps if the truth were known, feared them more than a little.

"It ain't right!" he puffed, after climbing eight flights of stairs and stopping momentarily to regain his breath. Finally he opened the door of the Page Shipping Company and was ushered directly into the private office of his employer.

Elwood Page was in his young seventies, with merely a touch of gray in his hair. He was short, thin-faced, straight in his spine, filled with nervous energy, snappy and alive. He appeared to be only fifty-five, and it was characteristic that he looked upon Captain Holm as being older than himself. He sat behind a flat mahogany desk, but arose to meet Holm, extending a friendly hand and regarding the white-haired mariner with quizzical, smiling blue eyes.

"Hello, Gus; glad to see you. Thought you'd be dropping in," was his greeting. He reached for a box of cigars.

"Hello, Mr. Page." Holm dropped wearily into the chair across the desk from where Page had again seated himself. He took a cigar, bit off the end and leaned forward to the match Page had struck for him.

"Well," said Page, settling back comfortably, "tomorrow the old scow goes to the boneyard. Aren't you glad? It opens the way for a better job for you."

"She ain't a scow," retorted Holm. "She's the sweetest sailing craft on the coast. She's—"

"Deep in red ink on our books," broke in Page. "You don't seem to be pleased that we're wiping off a liability."

"It ain't right to—"

"Correct," hastily agreed Page, deliberately choosing to misunderstand. "In the last year she's lost seven thousand dollars—and it's not your fault at all, Gus. Your passages were fast—one was a record."

"—to lay her up," continued Holm.

"And now she needs dry-docking, complete overhauling and a new suit of sails," Page went on. "I won't spend that money on a losing proposition. You'll have to admit it would be bad business. The day of the windjammer is gone; the sailing vessel can no longer compete with steam, and especially with Diesel motors."

"Aw, steamers is all right, maybe"—this was a distinct concession—"but give me a good schooner or barkentine, every time."

"DEMMIT!" snapped Page. "We've had this fool argument over again every year since 1905. And always the sum of your argument is that, 'It ain't right!' Gus, I'd be broke now if I'd stuck to sail and tried to compete with steam. Look at the fine big iron square-rigged vessels anchored over by Sausalito, and other places around the harbor. If you made a fair junk valuation offer, their owners would snap you up on it. I doubt if any of those vessels will ever again pass out through the Golden Gate. They won't pay operating expenses. The owners will save money by letting them rust to pieces at anchorage."

"Well, they're square-riggers. Schooners can be run a sight cheaper."

"Sure, and still lose money—on most runs. Gus, you're plain pig-headed! You're steeped in blue-water tradition. I've tried to make you see the light, but you couldn't see the hole in a doughnut if I held it up in front of you."

Captain Holm resented this, but was unable to frame the words for a retort. He puffed sulkily, but with inward appreciation for the delights of the fifty-center between his lips.

"I guess there is only one thing left for you, Gus," continued Page. "That's to shelve you on my pension policy."

"What's that? Never knew you had one," belligerently.

"That only proves you're behind the times, Gus. What? You've never even heard of my pension scheme?"

"Nope. What is it?" Puff, puff.

"When a man with an unblemished record as master has been with me for thirty years he gets retired on full pay—providing he doesn't go to work for any one else."

Holm sat up, terrified by the prospect of being forced to spend endless years of torture at Bayview. In his imagination he pictured miles and miles of immaculate lace curtains and acres of clean rugs.

PAGE leaned back and grinned contentedly. Mentally he was patting himself on the back at having put one over on Gus. He liked Holm and very much respected his ability as a seaman. The fly in Page's ointment was that he had never been able to convert Holm to the idea of taking the command of a steamship. To get a real navigator like Holm on the bridge of a $1,500,000 steamer was Page's idea of obtaining cheap additional insurance on the safety of his property. Page decided to rub in another insult.

"The trouble with you, Gus, is that you're getting old. Old, and more pig-headed with every year. You—"

"Who's old?" Captain Holm spat out the words. "Now looky here, Elwood Page, I've stood enough from you. You've been tryin' for years to force me into comin' 'round to your new-fangled ideas, but I'll be scuppered if it ain't a bit too much when you call me old, when I know danged well that you was born fifteen years before I was."

"Old in your ideas was what I meant," soothed Page. "You didn't let me finish."

"I didn't, hey? Well, you tell me right now how old that pension-after-thirty-years idea of yours is. I never heard of it before. Come out with the truth, once."

Page grinned again, knowing his bluff had been called.

"The truth, Gus, is that I invented it this afternoon."

"I thought so." A snort. "I'm not in line for charity."

"Gus, I was merely trying to do something for you, trying to make you come around to my way of thinking—for your own good. Next year I've got a big new steamer coming around from the east coast. I want it to be yours. I'll be proud to have you in command. I want you to go in one of my other steamers until then, so you can obtain your ticket for steam. You've got a family to take care of. Even as officer, your wages will be more than you've been getting as master in sail. And your pay in command of my crack steamer will be three times bigger."

Captain Holm hesitated. Always he had turned over four-fifths of his wages to his wife, but for some years the cost of living had been such that in order to make both ends meet she had been forced gradually to make serious inroads upon the savings to keep five children in school. But he shook his head.

"It ain't right that I should go in for steam. I've stuck to sail for forty-two years. I'll stick the rest of my time. My wife will manage to see things through until the kids get educated. I'll get another berth—even though it means off-shore, to Australia, China or South Africa. If I go deep-water it means I'll get home only mebbe once a year. The pay will be a little less, but on long trips I'll be able to save more to turn over to the wife. We'll get along. I'm sorry to quit you, Mr. Page—but good-by!" Holm walked out of the office.

Page sat thoughtfully rubbing his chin. In his heart he felt as though he had lost a dear friend, and, to him, Captain Holm, with his stiff-necked intention to stick to the old-time order of maritime things, was a pathetic object. He disliked the idea of such a competent navigator going to the employ of some other company and finally being turned out on the world, worse off than ever, when in turn the other company became convinced that even for off-shore voyages the day of the sailing vessel had gone.

A WEEK passed, a week of misery in many ways for Captain Gus Holm. He had discovered that to get another berth as master of a sailing vessel would be more than difficult, in fact, it would be next to impossible. In that week, eleven schooners arrived in San Francisco Bay, most of them with lumber cargoes from Puget Sound or the Columbia River. Three of the eleven, after their cargoes had been discharged, were slated to be hauled onto the flats of Oakland Creek—with three more good skippers "on the beach," and, naturally, these would be given the preference by their firms should any job be open.

But what caused the greatest worry to Captain Holm was his wife—also the lace curtains and rugs. He had to do his smoking on the back porch, his chewing when on the streets or on the ferry to San Francisco, where he went each day in his futile search for a job. On Sunday, his wife made him go to church, and twice during the first half of the sermon he fell asleep, to be prodded awake each time by the sharp elbow of Mrs. Holm. In a desperate effort to keep awake he managed to smuggle half a cubic inch of plug tobacco into his mouth, and then made the disconcerting discovery that the pew was not provided with a cuspidor.

Now Mrs. Holm was not a martinet; she was merely prim and a very good housewife. But she accused him, after the services, of having disgraced her before some of the members of the maritime set. And for the twentieth time within a few days she nagged and tried to force him into doing what Elwood Page wanted. Gus Holm became desperate, but all the more stubborn. He would not go into steam, even to keep peace in the family.

The maritime social clique in Bayview is a "Four Hundred" of its own, a circle in which the women speak of each other as Mrs. Captain Olsen, Mrs. Chief Engineer MacGregor, or Mrs. First Mate Smith. The wife of a master mariner socially outranks the wives of chief engineers and ships' officers. And by the unwritten law the wife of a man who commands a steamer is the superior of a woman whose husband merely treads the poop of a sailing vessel. The larger the tonnage of the steamer that the husband commands, the greater the prestige of his wife in the maritime set.

They are home-making, decent women, these wives of mariners, but with their husbands absent the greater part of the time they help to while away the days and weeks by playing their own social game and drawing tight their social lines. They may not be aware of it, but they are snobbish; they have an aristocracy of their own, these women who wait for their men to come back from the sea.

Mrs. Captain Gus Holm ranked fairly high in her social clique, but for years it had been rather trying for her to be forced to listen to other women relate how their husbands had quit the comparative mediocrity of commanding windjammers and had arisen to the bridge of steam vessels. Mrs. Holm suspected that the wife of a certain first officer on a large steamer was beginning to put on airs and feel herself the superior of a woman whose husband was so unprogressive that he was content to remain in plebeian sailing vessels. Steam was king.

Although Captain Holm's bungalow was partly covered with roses, his wife saw to it that none of them strayed onto his bed. Life at home was so unbearable that poor Gus was glad to receive a telephone call from Elwood Page. He hastened to the nearest ferry train.

PAGE, as usual, opened the box of fifty-centers and then struck a match for Holm. They settled back in their chairs.

"Gus," began Page, "I want your advice."

"About what?" inquired Holm warily.

"Smith's Landing. I've bought the old mill up there—the standing timber went with it. I'm going to open up the mill again—and I want to consult you on the best way to freight the lumber down here."

Smith's Landing was on the rugged coast of Mendocino County, about one hundred miles north of San Francisco Bay. As a port it had less than no value, being merely an extremely dangerous anchorage in the open sea at the base of a one-hundred-and-fifty-foot cliff. In past years when Holm had called there for a cargo, his vessel had been moored fore and aft to a couple of buoys while the lumber came down from the top of the cliff on a cable tram, the lower end of this cable being attached to a third buoy placed some distance to seaward from the moored vessel. It was a clumsy, awkward arrangement at best and very slow in loading a vessel. Only for a few months in summer could Smith's Landing be used as a seaport, for the rest of the year it lay open to the seasonable squalls and gales. In the spring or fall it was hazardous to attempt to load there. In winter it was suicide.

"You bought it?" repeated Holm. "And you want my advice? My advice is to sell it again—if any one will be crazy enough to take it off your hands. Why did you buy it?"

"Because I got it for sixty thousand dollars. The sawmill can be put into running order for very little money; the machinery is in fine shape—all I'll have to replace is the boiler. I've just received a report from the man I sent up there. The last timber cruiser's report was twenty-five million feet of redwood, all accessible, easily logged and sent down to the millpond."

"You've had reports from everybody except a seaman—"

"Twenty-five million feet," continued Page, "that I can run through the mill, and then be able to afford to junk the mill. Oh, it was a sweet bargain. I'll triple my money within two years."

"You mean ten years—and then lose money. You'd better wake up. How in thunder are you going to get the lumber shipped out of there?"

"That's where you come in, Gus. You're so demmed pig-headed that you won't take a good job—you won't take a pension, either—so I'm making you superintendent of marine transportation at Smith's Landing. I'm raising you to four hundred dollars a month—and all you'll have to do is to get the lumber down to San Francisco."

"OH, IS that all?" dryly. "Mr. Page, I happen to know a lot about Smith's Landing. Old Eph Smith ran that mill for twenty years and never made a dime out of it. The best he could do was break even. He failed to make interest on his investment. Eph used to spend his summers right on the spot. When I used to go up there for you in '95 in the old *Henrietta*, I would eat ashore with Eph in the cook-shack or he would come aboard to have supper in the cabin with me. He told me his troubles—and his troubles consisted of one thing: he had no seaport. He could run one hundred thousand feet of lumber a day through his mill—three hundred days a year. What good did it do him? He was lucky to have forty or fifty thousand feet go down the tramway into a vessel in a day, and one hundred and twenty loading days would be a good year. He had to shut down his mill about ten months every year to let the port catch up with his output.

"The mill has been shut down for twelve years. Why? If you'll remember, it was twelve years ago that the *Adam Smith* went against the cliffs in the southwest squall.

A good schooner gone, with eight hands aboard! That finished it for Eph. The third wreck. Seventeen seamen have been drowned at the foot of that cliff—that death-trap.

"What's there now? I ran in close last year and looked it over through the glasses. The mooring buoys are gone. The tram cable buoy is gone. The cable is a piece of junk hanging down the cliff—not even worth hauling up. You'll have to buy a new cable, new buoys, new anchors. And the place will still be a trap for sailing vessels. A loading capacity of forty thousand feet a day. You can't send anything but a sailing vessel up there—a steam schooner would eat its head off layin' there three weeks at a time for a load."

"You're 'way behind the times, Gus," smiled Page. "I've figured this out with my son-in-law—"

"Oh, Martin—" snorted Holm, and there was mingled contempt and grudging respect behind the snort. The contempt was because Hugo Martin was young and purely a steamship man—with a mere seven years of seamanship back of him. The respect was due to the fact that in those seven years young Martin had upon more than one occasion proven himself to be an ingenious and lucky son of Neptune. When Opportunity knocked Martin used a blackjack first and then dragged Opportunity in across the threshold.

"Young blood, that's what I've needed in the business," declared Page. "Hugo sized this thing up for me. First, he said, 'Why not put in three or four tramways instead of just one?' Eph Smith never dreamed of using more than one, to speed things up and double or triple the output. Martin's next idea was to suspend a chute down the cliff, with a flexible end that could be dragged aboard a vessel. The lower end could be hoisted up in bad weather so it wouldn't be damaged by the seas. Lumber could be fed down that chute as fast as it could be stowed away aboard."

"It'd work," conceded Holm, "if it was built right," he added. "Mebbe there's somethin' in this young blood idea when it comes to new-fangled ways of speedin' up loadin'. But how's the young blood goin' to take care of the weather? Sou'west squalls are still liable to howl up out of nothing. A sailing vessel—"

"Gus, you have a single-track mind. With that loading chute working, I can afford to send steam schooners up there. And you've never even thought about an auxiliary schooner. When bad weather threatens, a vessel with a motor in her could work her way to the open sea and ride it out."

Holm nodded thoughtfully.

"And, Gus," continued Page, "if you're soured on the Smith's Landing job as being too cheap for a real seaman, I've got another berth to offer you. Do you know the *Nanuku?* No? You'll see her when you go back across the ferry. She's the trim little two-topmast schooner anchored off India Basin. She's been running between Honolulu and the Gilberts. She belonged to an estate and was ordered here to be sold in order to settle up the estate. My breakfast table at home overlooks the Golden Gate, and last month I saw the *Nanuku* coming in. Man, but she took the eye, with the sun on her topsails and a bone in her teeth.

"I've always had a sneaking desire for a sea-going yacht. In a business way I'm through with sail, but for pleasure it's the only thing. I bought the *Nanuku* at auction, and there's carpenters working now refitting her cabin. She goes into drydock tomorrow. How'd you like to be skipper on my yacht? It'd be a soft job."

"I DON'T want it," growled Holm. "That's just another way of covering up a pension. All the sailing you'll ever do will be to go out around the Farallones some Sunday afternoon. You'd get seasick and spend the rest of your life thinking up new excuses for keeping the schooner east of Lime Point—while you're aboard."

"Is that so? You stiff-necked old fool, I'm offering you a man's job. The only way to get men and supplies to the mill and the logging camp at Smith's Landing is by sea—and I can't afford right now to take a steamer off her run. So I'm using the *Nanuku*. I guess I forgot to mention she's auxiliaried with a big six-cylinder marine motor. She can do eight knots under the motor alone, but the motor is an old-fashioned gas-devourer—three gallons to the mile—or something like that, according to the motor expert who looked her over for me. But the motor will be a life-saver in keeping the vessel clear of the cliffs in case of bad weather."

"I don't trust motors," replied Holm. "And without the tram, how are you goin' to get the supplies from the vessel up to the mill?"

"Oh," grinned Page, "if you take the job of superintendent of marine transportation at Smith's Landing, you'll have to figure that out. On small details like that I always hire men to do the worrying for me. Come to think of it, I'll combine the jobs of superintendent and yacht captain. How about it?"

"Don't want either of them. I don't like Smith's Landing. I've been master for over thirty years—and with never a collision or wreck!" Proudly. "And it ain't right that I should take chances of breaking that record. If Hugo Martin is so all-jiggered smart, let him show it at Smith's Landing. I want a blue-water job—not a dog-hole proposition."

"Scared, eh?" gibed Page.

"No, just sensible. I'll find another job —sometime."

"I've offered you the last chance to run a sailing vessel—the *Nanuku*. I'll lay you ten to one that you'll finally wind up on some dirty coal-burning tub of an antiquated steam-schooner. Sooner or later you'll have to go into steam. Why not start at the top? Be sensible, and next year you'll be in command of my new eight-thousand tonner."

"It ain't right that I should go into steam. Good-by, Mr. Page." Captain Holm started for the door.

"Hey, wait a minute! The *Nanuku* will be in commission next week. We're taking a week-end run up to look over the ground at Smith's Landing. My daughter, myself and Martin. Martin suggested that I get you to come along. There's a scow schooner going up in a day or two to lay the new moorings."

"You're crazy!" retorted Holm. "Here it's only the first part of April. It ain't half-way safe up there until after the first of May. Another sou'west gale, and even your moorings are liable to go adrift."

"Not these," laughed Page. "Not with two old, heavy ship's anchors, with heavy chain, on each buoy."

"Just the same, I wouldn't be pokin' the nose of a vessel too close to the cliffs at this time of the year. It ain't right."

"Nonsense! The motor in the *Nanuku* makes it safe. And Hugo Martin is a good seaman."

"Yes, a *steamer* seaman," was Holm's parting word.

GUS wandered disconsolately homeward. His wife was absent so he tilted back a chair, placed his feet comfortably on the highly polished dining table and began reading *The Shipping Guide*. Forgetting that he was in the house, he lighted a particularly villainous pipe, and for a few minutes was comparatively happy.

Mrs. Holm entered quietly through the kitchen door and for a moment stood aghast, vainly trying to decide which was the greater sin—the heavy smoke screen or the shoes on the polished table.

"*Gus!* she shrilled, at last finding her voice.

Captain Holm was so startled that he fell backwards with his chair, live coals from his pipe scattering to smolder on his wife's pet rug. He scrambled to his feet, wishing he were anywhere but in his own home. Then with remarkable presence of mind he began talking first, to forestall the flood of words his wife was due to let loose. Stealthily, meanwhile, he stamped out the live coals on the rug.

"Now listen, Tinka, I was talking to Elwood Page today. He offered me two fine jobs."

"Yes,"—coldly, but with interest—"what were they?"

"Skipper on Page's private yacht and superintendent of marine transportation at Smith's Landing—or both of them."

"Which one did you take?"

"Aw, I turned 'em both down. Had to."

"What? Turned down two fine jobs? Gus, how could you? Superintendent of marine transportation!" Mrs. Holm rolled out the syllables. "What a fine-sounding job! And you turned it down?"

Concealed somewhere in Gus Holm was a sense of humor. It came to the surface.

"Yep, I robbed you of a chance to be known as Mrs. Superintendent-of-Marine-Transportation Holm. That'd make 'em all sit up, wouldn't it? And there was four hundred a month in the job, too."

"Gus, you're teasing me. I know you took the job."

"Nope! Mr. Page didn't mean it that way, but the man who takes that job will come to grief. I've got grief enough now."

Gus was wrong, for Mrs. Holm immediately dumped hitherto concealed wholesale quantities of grief onto the market. She flew into tearful hysterics, and fretfully pushed him away when he did his clumsy best to comfort her.

"Four hundred a month—more than double pay—and you turned it dow-wn," she wailed. Another freshet of tears.

Gus suffered two more repulses, then retrieved his pipe, took his hat and left the house. His presence seemed only to aggravate her, so he would walk the streets until the children had returned from school. Tinka had pride, he knew, and would not display her distress—or at least so much of it—in front of the kids.

NINE days passed, and Captain Holm had become almost desperate enough to be willing to go into steam. He had said nothing to his wife about his chance to take command of an eight thousand ton steamer the following year.

It was Saturday morning when Holm, who had brought his nautical instruments to the bungalow, took a look at the barometer. It was a very expensive glass, presented to him some years previously by Elwood Page. Holm was thinking of the *Nanuku*, which, late the afternoon before, had sailed for Smith's Landing. The barometer showed no change, but Holm tapped it lightly with a fingernail. The indicator dropped a scarcely discernible fraction.

Holm walked out to a seat on the front porch. He sat deep in thought, at intervals spitting tobacco juice into the rose bushes. An hour later he again tapped the glass front of the barometer. Another slight drop was registered. Barometers are temperamental and vary in their degree of efficiency, but Holm had come to know and trust this particular instrument. It had never lied to him in the slightest. He was not a betting man, but right now he would have staked anything he owned that a southerly gale was brewing. He turned to the front porch, his thoughts centered on the probable whereabouts of the *Nanuku*. For perhaps the fortieth time he spat thoughtfully over the porch railing, and this time his wife saw him do it.

"*Gus Holm!*" came her outraged voice. "You've put nasty tobacco juice all over the new bush I planted last year. Look at those buds—all messed up!"

"Aw, it'll kill the bugs," growled Gus. "Last time I was home you brewed up half a plug and used it on the bushes."

"But not that way. You get the hose and wash off the mess you've made. Right away! Do you hear?"

"I hear, but I ain't gonna do it," revolted Gus, again deliberately spraying the unfortunate bush.

The storm promised by the barometer was nothing to what Gus immediately brought down on his head. He stood for just so much, then arose with a disgusted "Aw, woman, shut up!"

She shut, in sheer surprise, for this was the first time in twenty-five years of married life that Gus had failed to knuckle under—except in the matter of going into steam. Gus walked through the house to the rear porch, bundled a pair of high rubber boots and a sou'wester into an oilskin coat, tied up the bundle with a bit of tarred marlin and started away with it. His wife grew alarmed.

"Gus, where are you going?" she called after him.

"To see if a darned young fool has got into trouble," was his answer. "Don't expect me back till you see me." And with that she was forced to be content.

LESS than an hour later found Captain Holm in San Francisco, awaiting the Sausalite ferry. After reaching the northern side of the bay he took an auto stage for Mendocino county. It was nearly dark when he arrived in Ukiah, an inland town, over twenty miles from the coast. Immediately he went to a garage displaying the sign: *Autos for rent.*

"Smith's Landing," repeated the garage owner. "I'm sorry, brother, but you can't get there tonight. The road washed out years ago—it was a hell of a road, at that—and the nearest you can get to it now with a machine is about six miles. You'll have to go the rest of the way on foot." With curiosity, the garage man studied the bundle wrapped in the oilskin coat.

"Ready for rain, eh?"

"Yes, there'll be a southerly gale tonight—and that means rain. I'd like to get to Smith's Landing."

"You'll never make it; you don't know what you're up against. What in the devil is your hurry to get there? Not a soul within six miles. They haven't had a watchman, even, at the mill for over eight years. If you're going that way, you'd better take some grub along; it's a hungry country. And that's a good tip."

Holm considered, and realized that probably he was making a fool of himself. The gale hadn't started yet—and what could he do alone at night? What could he hope to do at any time? But overriding this again came the premonition that the *Nanuku* would get into trouble, and that he would be needed.

"I guess you're right; the morning will do. My name is Holm. I want an automobile ready for me at six o'clock. I'll be over at the hotel, and I'll leave orders to be called early." Gus walked away, leaving the garage man scratching his head. Gus was so obviously of the sea that the fellow suspected a new booze smuggling scheme, with the old mill as a landing place. Fine! It would have to come through Ukiah, and the garage man determined to get in on the ground floor. He could handle a few cases of good stuff each week, could find an easy sale for it, at a large profit, right there in town. This dream was shattered by thoughts of the six miles of vehically impassable country. But still—

SO IT was the garage owner himself who at six the next morning drove a car up in front of the hotel. It had started to blow from the south at midnight, and now it was raining heavily. Seven-thirty found them at "the head of navigation" on a long-disused country road.

"This is as far as I can make it, Cap," said the driver.

Holm laughed.

"I've heard of sea-going hacks, but this is the first time I ever rode in one. It's the third time I ever rode in one of these here automobiles. I've been kind of scared of them—didn't trust them—but this trip has sort of opened my eyes. I ain't had much faith in motors, but this one is a snortin' devil when you reef her down."

"Reef—? Oh, you mean when I had to put her into low."

"Yep, if that's what you call it when the mud flew high. How much do I owe you?"

"Forget that for a while, Cap. I'm wise, and I want to get in on this thing. Whoever picked Smith's Landing gave you a wrong steer. I know a couple of better places where there'll be no interference. The Feds never get up here at all, and it won't take much to make the county officers listen to reason. And you might do worse than letting me furnish the trucks."

For a moment Captain Holm stared blankly, puzzled. Then he laughed.

"Son, you're all wrong. If I was runnin' the stuff in, I wouldn't try it at Smith's Landing. I know the place. But this fool trip of mine is just on a hunch—because some other men don't know what I know. I wish't you come along with me. Ten lives or so may be in danger. I don't know's we can do anything if they are—but we can't tell. I'm spendin' my time and money on nothin' but a queer feeling and a chill up my back. Want to sail along on my hunch? I'll need that automobile to go back in from here anyway."

"I'll say you will. If you intend hiking to the landing and back again in those gum boots you're either awful crazy or deadly serious. I wore 'em in the trenches—and I know. You'll raise the finest crop of blisters in Mendocino county. I'm just crazy enough to follow your hunch. You don't look exactly crazy to me. My name's O'Brien." He stuck out a hand. Gus seized it and grinned.

O'Brien wore well-oiled high-laced boots, an imitation-leather rubberized coat and a felt hat. He turned down the hat brim all around and stepped out of the car.

"Let's go, Cap. I still don't know what it's all about, but I'm game. I know the road to Smith's old mill. Follow me." O'Brien bowed his head and started out in the face of the driving rain.

TWO hours and a half of struggle over what was left of a slippery gray clay road brought them to Smith's Landing. Captain Holm hastened to the edge of the cliff and looked down. He turned almost sick with worry, for, with her stern scarcely seventy feet from the base of the sea-pounded rocky cliff, the *Nanuku* lay riding to a single yellow strand of manila line attached to a half-submerged red buoy about three hundred feet farther to seaward.

A huge sea, driving cliffward under impetus of the gale, smashed the schooner's bow. She lifted; the mooring hawser snapped taut; the buoy was pulled nearly beneath the surface, and simultaneously the sea broke on the forecastle head. Recovering from the blow, the schooner's bow arose, shedding cataracts of green and white water. Holm saw that several turns of the riding line had been taken around the capstan, the hawser leading from there to a bitt. Two men in oilskins were visible on the after deck. One was leaning over a hatchway. He straightened up, turned to the other and shook his head.

"They must have made a mistake, to get her in there," said O'Brien. "How many cases has she got aboard?"

"None, I told you. The mill here is going to be opened up. The people on the vessel came to look it over."

"They sure took a hell of a way of coming. They can't see much from down there."

Holm smiled grimly.

"They're staring death in the face right now, and maybe they don't know it. That man who just straightened up was yellin' down the engine-room hatch. He shook his head. I figger that the motor won't work. They'd oughta known better than trust it. If they don't get the vessel out of there before tonight, she's gone. Thank God! it's a *new* eight-inch line. Look at the stern mooring." Holm pointed northward to another buoy, from which a broken piece of line, gray from service, streamed away.

"Eight inch?" yelled O'Brien, against the wind. "From here it looks like a piece of yellow string. If that's an eight-inch line I'm a fuzzy-haired Hottentot."

"That means eight inches around—not through," explained Gus. "The breaking strain is about thirty tons—maybe a little more, with luck. Dragging that buoy under is a bad sign, but it relieves the direct strain. She'll last through the day, but when it blows up tonight—I know these gales."

"It's hell, ain't it?" declared O'Brien, staring downward to where the rusted old tram cable disappeared in the tossing mass of foam at the base of the cliff.

"It's worse than that," answered Holm. "Elwood Page—he's the man who bought the mill—was going to bring his daughter along."

"A girl is aboard, huh!" said O'Brien. "And the schooner can get out of there if her motor works?"

"Yep—if it works."

"I'll bet they've got a cheese engineer aboard. I'm a motor expert. If there was some way I could get aboard—"

"There ain't, unless they can shoot a line up here."

"Can't they hoist the sails and get away?"

"Not enough searoom. Look at those rocks out there. She can't sail into the eye of the wind, and that's the only clear passage."

ONE of the men on deck looked up. He waved a hand to show he had seen the two figures at the top of the cliff. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, but his voice was lost in the boom of the seas smashing against the rocks.

"I can tie a note around a rock and throw it down to him," offered O'Brien. "What message?"

"Tell him to shoot up a line."

"All right. I'll go into that shed, out of the rain."

O'Brien's pockets contained several old envelopes, a pencil and a roll of insulation tape. He wrote two notes, each on the back of an envelope, then luckily in a corner of the dirt-floored shed found two dry pieces of rock weighing perhaps half a pound apiece. He folded the envelopes compactly and with the sticky tape fastened each to one of the small rocks, using enough tape to make compact bundles. Leaving his heavy outer coat behind, lest it hinder his pitching arm, he ran to the edge of the cliff.

Carefully he gauged distance, then let fly with one of the messages. His aim was true; the tape-wrapped rock struck the after deck and bounced overboard. Hoping for better luck, O'Brien threw the other message. One of the men on the deck unsnapped the front of his oilskin coat and watched the missile hurtling from above. He stepped backward a few feet, then as the rock struck the deck he opened wide his coat and fell forward, to trap the bouncing message.

"Say, that guy's a ball-player," enthused O'Brien. "If he'd tried to catch it direct he'd 'a' thought he was trying to stop a one-pounder shell. But he smothered the bounce. That was using his noodle. He's sure got a good eye."

"He's Hugo Martin," said Holm. "I recognized him as he looked up."

"He's all right, that guy," asserted O'Brien.

"Maybe," snorted Holm. "He's the one who got the schooner into trouble."

Martin unwrapped the tape and read the four-word message. He looked up, shook his head and spread his hands in a gesture of apology or denial.

"No rockets or no gun to shoot a line," groaned Captain Holm. "I've never yet had use for them, but no vessel of mine ever goes to sea without that equipment."

The cabin companionway doors opened and two people came on deck. One was unmistakably a woman, and Martin immediately crossed to lend her a supporting arm. Holm made a guess that the other newcomer was Elwood Page. A head popped up from the engine-room hatchway, and three sailors ducked from the forward deckhouse to run aft. The rocks thumping on the deck had caused an alarm. All of them, braced against the heave of the vessel or holding to something solid, were staring intently at the top of the cliff.

From seaward raced an enormous wave. Holm futilely shouted and gestured, with the effect that he was watched all the more intently. The green crest of the incoming sea arose high above the schooner's bow and broke aboard. Martin and his wife were thrown to the deck and washed to the stern rail by the flood of water which swept clear aft. But the rail saved them.

The schooner leaped toward the cliff. Holm closed his eyes and breathed a prayer. Suffering, scarcely daring to look down, Holm opened his eyes. His heart was in his mouth, choking him. The suffocating sensation lessened as he saw that the strand of new yellow line still stretched unbroken between the schooner's bow and the buoy.

BUT something had happened—something serious. The distance between the cliff and the schooner's stern had lessened by half. The seventy feet of security had diminished to not much more than thirty. In a sudden lull of the wind's force, spray from the cliff drenched the schooner's poop. But the mooring line had slackened, giving more play to take up the strain of each smashing sea. Holm realized that the constant rush of surface water against the cliff had to find a return channel to seaward. The undertow in a small degree was helping the schooner.

What he could not understand immediately was what had happened to the buoy It had shifted its position. Were the anchors dragging? He thought of Page's boast, of the two heavy old-fashioned mudhooks that were to be on each buoy. It came to Holm that the sudden strain of the unusually large sea must have been enough to have snapped the arm of the fluke of one anchor. Nothing else could account for the sudden shift in the position of the buoy. And the changed position of the schooner had brought its stern directly opposite the rusted length of tram cable hanging down the cliff.

"Son," exclaimed Holm, "there's only one chance to save the lives of those aboard. That's to beach the vessel at the mouth of that creek." He pointed northward along the half-moon face of the cliff to a point three hundred yards distant where the mouth of a cañon broke through the abrupt barrier of rock. There was a stretch of silver-gray sand less than two hundred feet in width, and beyond it the gaunt, forbidding face of spray-drenched cliff continued to the limit of vision. Across a channel through the sand belched the muddied waters of a freshet, the result of last night's rain. This same creek, through a flume leading far into the hills, had furnished the water for the Smith's Landing millpond.

"How can it be done, Cap?" questioned O'Brien. "If that motor can be started—"

"If it could, the vessel wouldn't be there now." Holm's reply was rather tart. "She's got to be beached. And that young Martin, who is a good steamship man, can't do it. Forty-two years in sailing craft is my record, and I know every trick any seaman has ever learned in my time. I'm going down this cable and get aboard."

"You're crazy!" yelped the other, grasping Holm's arm.

"Aw, they'll heave a line to me, after I get down to that ledge. You can see it—about forty feet above the surface or above where the surface ought to be."

"Gosh, Cap, you've sure got guts," admiringly. "I'm going with you. If anything that runs on gasoline can be made to turn over, I'm the boy who can make it. Get me?"

"You stay here," ordered Holm. "If that engine can be fixed I'll signal for you to come down. If it can't there's no use of your trying to get aboard. You can be of more use by staying ashore. We may need you."

"All right, Cap. But remember that I'm game to follow you anywhere. So you're going down that streak of rust." O'Brien grasped the cable. "It'll cut hell out of your hands. Here"—dragging a pair of heavy leather gauntlets from a pocket—"wear these. They'll save a lot of wear and tear on your fingers. And say, Cap, they couldn't shoot a line up here, but if we can get ahold of one, maybe you can take it down to them."

Holm approved of the idea. They separated on a search through the deserted mill and other buildings. Holm found nothing. O'Brien returned with a coil of rusted wire, but it proved to be less than one hundred feet in length—worse than useless. Holm finally squeezed his fingers in the gauntlets and laid hold of the cable. He started to swing his body over the edge of the cliff. O'Brien stopped him.

"Are you sure you ain't pridin' yourself, Cap?" he queried anxiously. "Remember you ain't as young as you used to be. You may be able to get down to the ledge, all right—but you'll never be able to climb back. Be sure of what you're startin'—before you start."

"Thanks, son," replied Holm. "Don't worry about me. If that riding line holds till I'm able to show that steamer seaman a little real seamanship, I'll be safe. So long!" Holm started lowering himself, hand under hand, down the cliff—watched by anxious eyes from above and below.

HE REACHED the ledge, thirty feet above normal high-water mark, to be greeted by a vicious slap of wind-driven spray and a swirl of water around his knees as a wave spent its force in dashing high up the cliff. The water receded. To Holm's surprise, his boots had filled with icy water. Still holding to the cable with both hands, he looked down. From the insteps to above his knees the rubber boots had been shredded and slashed by the "whiskers"—broken ends of rusty wire—sticking out from the cable. There was blood on his gloves, but he considered trifling the few scratches which were the extent of injury to his hands.

Below him, across thirty feet of boiling, surging water, Martin stood at the stern rail of the schooner, with a heaving line, coiled, ready to cast. A sailor came up from the lazaret dragging the end of a new manila line. With satisfaction, Holm saw that it was a two-and-a-half-inch line—a rope about three-fourths of an inch thick, capable of holding a dead weight of nearly two tons.

"Get another heaving line!" shouted Holm. "Another heaving line!" Martin looked blank. It took fully a minute of shouting for Holm to make himself heard against the gale and above the roar of the seas smashing on the rocks. A sailor hurried to get the other small rope.

Martin balanced himself on the pitching deck. A few whirls, and the weighted end of the heaving line shot upward, to strike the cliff above Holm. The line dropped down on Holm's outstretched arm. Quickly, in the lull between heavy seas, he hauled the end of the new manila rope up to him. Freeing it from the heaving line, with a seaman's deftness he made a rolling hitch high up on the rusted wire cable. Then he was deluged by foam, spray and swirling water and was forced to cling to the cable. The water subsided. Holm yelled and motioned for the second heaving line.

"Oh, the old water-dog wants a free ride. I didn't get what he meant before," laughed Martin to Page.

"Give him anything he wants," yelped Page. "He's coming aboard to laugh at you. Maybe he'll get us out of this fix."

"My hat's off to him if he can," was Martin's cheery answer as he flung the heaving line with an expert flip.

Holm again caught it on outstretched arm. Immediately he stooped and made it securely fast around one ankle. Straightening up, he seized the new manila line and motioned for a little slack. The two sailors holding it eased away. Holm crooked both legs around it and motioned for all hands to haul in. The manila line straightened out, pulling the wire cable a short distance from the cliff. Holm threw his oilskin clad left arm around the line and held on loosely with his right hand. Martin hauled in rapidly on the line attached to Holm's ankle. Within a few seconds Holm had been snatched across on the aerial tram to the schooner's deck.

ACCUSINGLY he faced Martin.

"Thank the Lord, you didn't drop your anchors! Why didn't you?" Martin grinned at the contradiction.

"Because he hoped at first to get the

motor running. And after the stern line snapped it was too late for the anchors to do any good. The cliff was too close."

"They wouldn't have done any good, anyway," contemptuously. "Not when the gale freshens tonight. I see your sails are new. Get a reef in the fores'l, and ready to h'ist away. No, make it a double reef—that'll serve the purpose and be easier to set. Break out the stays'l ready to h'ist. And—"

"But, Captain Holm," expostulated Martin, "we can't sail—"

"The hell we can't!" barked Holm. "Can that damned motor be fixed? I've got an expert engineer up on the cliff—ready to come aboard."

"It's plumb out of commission. We just got word from below that something had crystallized and has snapped. But we—"

"How much more of that eight-inch line have you got?" interrupted Holm.

"Half a cable-length."

"Break out enough to run a spring from the mooring line, outside the bow chock, and aft to this poop bitt. It'll be a wet job—and dangerous—but I'd try it myself if I had enough strength left." Holm braced himself as another sea tumbled green over the bow. "Wait a minute! That job is suicide right now. Oil might help—can't tell, but try it. Break out everything you've got in the shape of oil. It might make a 'slick' to wind'ard."

Martin glanced appealingly toward Elwood Page, as though to say: "What shall I do?"

"Do exactly what Gus orders," was Page's reply to the unspoken question. "I don't know what he's going to do, but you shake a leg and help him do it. I've got confidence in Gus. He didn't come down that cliff to have tea with us."

"I'm going to spring-haul the vessel and sail her ashore on that bit of beach," explained Holm pointing north to where the freshet waters had widened their channel across the sand. "I can pick within a fathom of where I'll let her hit the beach. It's our only chance to get ashore alive."

"Spring-haul—" repeated Martin, thinking of the innumerable times he had used this maneuver in jockeying steam vessels alongside of wharves. He slapped the top of his head as though a sudden light had dawned. "You win, Captain Holm! I'm your man." He raced to the forecastle. His voice came aft on the wind: "All hands on deck! Come out of there, you fat Swede—before I drag you out!"

Elwood Page chuckled. "Can you imagine that sailor asleep? At a crisis like this?"

"Sure," answered Holm reaching beneath his oilskin coat and then eying distastefully the sea water dampened plug he brought forth. He bit off the best-looking corner and stowed it away in his cheek. He looked forward at Martin's activities, then burst out:

"By gorry, Mr. Page—*it ain't right!*"

"What isn't right—this time?"

"I've got a clean record as master for over thirty years—and now I've got to wreck a vessel *deliberately*."

"Your record will be cleaner than ever, Gus," declared Page. "You warned me against Smith's Landing at this time of the year. But I had faith in Hugo and in the motor."

"Oh, Martin's all right," was Holm's gruff answer. "He's a good steamboat man, and he's got the makin's of a good seaman. He didn't get scared and drop his anchors after it was too late. All he lacks is experience."

PAGE'S daughter, holding to the companionway combing, had been a silent listener. But now she laughed and made a mock curtsy to Holm.

"Oh, thank you, kind sir, for those kind words about my only husband. They're the first I've heard today." The schooner rolled; the girl slipped and skidded across the deck. Holm picked her up.

"Tell me honestly," she said, "was our situation awfully serious? Hugo was worried, I know, but he wouldn't say much."

Holm squirted a stream of tobacco juice over the near-by rail.

"Your husband had a right to be worried. I'll be honest. Tomorrow morning this schooner would have been nothing but a mess of smashed timbers. No one aboard would be alive. All that saves us now is the fact that Martin ran out a brand new line. But we'll be ashore in an hour or so. There's nothing to worry about. Better get on your heaviest shoes; you've got a six-mile walk ahead of you."

"But is Hugo to blame?"

Holm thought quickly of his own wife.

"Not a damned—excuse me, Mrs. Martin, not a bit. The motor broke down.

You can't blame Hugo for that, can you?"

"No—thank you, Captain Holm. I—feel better."

Martin came aft to report.

"This schooner just came back from the South Seas; there was some cocoanut oil aboard. I dumped that over the side—and it floated away in solid chunks—frozen. We tried some of cottonseed oil from the galley, linseed oil and lubricating oil. One of them works—all of them spread more or less to wind'ard—and the last two combers failed to break aboard. The spring is fast for'ard. The men are bringing it aft. Do you want it led through this after chock?"

"Yes," said Holm. "We haul in all the slack we can; then lay on with a watch tackle and heave the spring taut."

Martin sprang away to find the tackle. In another minute the spring line had been hove taut and made fast to a bitt.

"H'ist the fores'l, Mr. Martin," ordered Holm. "Then stand by for'ard to cut the mooring line when you see me raise my arm straight up. I'll take the wheel. Never mind the stays'l—she'll sail pretty without it. Send two men aft to cast off the spring when I sing out. Order them aft when you get the fores'l up. Is that clear?"

"Aye, aye, sir!"

"You will stand by the fore sheet, to slacken away when I head her straight for the beach. Wait till you see me raise my arm again, then slack on the sheet. Keep her drawing full; the harder we hit the beach the better. If we go in on the crest of a sea I'll drive her almost high and dry."

HOLM walked forward, momentarily glanced north along the cliff, then with his own hands calculatingly slackened the fore sheet and hauled in the slack on the boom tackle. Martin had cast off the throat halliards from the pin. To his measured "Yo-ho!" the crew heaved away, even the cook lending a hand. Holm walked aft to the engine-room hatch. "Get for'ard and take my place!" he bellowed to the engineer. "They need beef on those halliards, not brains."

Which caused Page to cackle and his daughter to snicker. Both of them felt very much relieved at the arrival of Captain Holm. He inspired confidence, a sense of security.

"And to think," grinned Page to the girl, "that all the time I've been wrong about Gus Holm in two things. I've never accused him of possessing either a sense of humor or any diplomacy. That order to the engineer was funny."

"And how did he prove that he is a diplomat, daddy?"

"Well, he almost proved it by the way he spoke to you about Hugo."

"Captain Holm told the truth. I think he's a perfect old dear, he blamed that horrid engine, not Hugo."

"Which proves he's a diplomat," smilingly.

Holm looked up and waved a hand at O'Brien, who had been watching anxiously from the top of the cliff. Then in pantomime he indicated that O'Brien should go around to the beach. O'Brien nodded understandingly, and disappeared.

The foresail rose, flapping, until it "spilled" the wind as it stretched taut between the gaff and the reef points around the boom. Two sailors hurried aft. Martin went onto the forecastle head, in his hands a sharp ax. Holm waited until a huge "king wave," its crest tamed by an oil film, had jerked the schooner's bow aloft and passed on to smash against the cliff. Holm laid his right hand on the wheel spokes, one of the sailors standing by to assist him. Holm raised his left arm above his head.

With all the strength of Hugo Martin's muscles behind it, the ax descended upon the manila line stretched taut between the capstan and the port bow chock. Another quick blow and the few remaining strands parted with a noise like a muffled gunshot. The line snapped away and "plopped" through the crest of a smaller sea.

The schooner had been riding with her bow connected directly to the distant buoy. Martin had severed the bow connection. Wind and sea immediately forced the schooner toward the cliff—but only for a few feet. The spring line, which had been made fast beyond the vessel's bow to the severed hawser, now took up the strain. The schooner was still connected to the buoy, but by the spring line to her stern. If she swung completely around, her bow would strike the cliff. Her bow swung off to the north. The gale full forced bellied the reefed foresail. With the spring line to the stern stretched taut and swinging north in an arc with the vessel's movement, the schooner got the equivalent of a running start. She moved farther and farther from the cliff. Holm spun the wheel, then whirled it part way back again.

"Let go!" he shouted frantically.

The two sailors cast loose the spring line from the bitt. The end whipped out through the chock. The schooner, sailing north at a rate of perhaps seven knots, was now fifty yards from the cliff. Captain Holm felt jubilant; for a moment he was rash enough to think of trying to gain the open sea. Another wave swept in from seaward, causing geysers of foam to spring up as it smashed across a patch of upstanding rock fangs. Not a chance in a thousand of getting through. "No chance at all!" he mused aloud, as he saw that the vessel's leeway in the trough had diminished by one-third the distance from the cliff.

"Pay off!" he bellowed, raising high his left arm for a scant second and then seizing the wheel, to spin it. The schooner's course changed abruptly to the east.

MARTIN judiciously slacked away on the fore sheet. The vessel was now heading directly for the breakers on the beach. With wind and sea astern, her speed increased. From seaward towered the crest of an enormous wave. In a twinkling it had overtaken and lifted the schooner's stern. Its crest curled and broke. Like a surf-riding canoe coming shoreward from the reef at Waikiki the schooner was hurtled at thirty-knot speed toward the sand. She struck bottom lightly, with her bow. Then she was lifted high by the giant comber and carried in until her bow plunged into the sand, and the whole length of her keel dropped with a thump on the shelving beach.

Holm stepped from behind the wheel, walked to the rail and carefully spat his quid into the surf.

"High tide a few minutes ago," he grunted. "Couldn't be better."

Page laughed at Holm's matter-of-habit carefulness in refraining from spitting on the deck.

"You folks better get for'ard," suggested Holm. "It's going to be mighty wet here on the poop."

"Why, isn't this rain—"

Slap! A breaker smashed the vessel's stern; a cloud of salt spray leaped high and was whipped stingingly against them by the wind.

"We'll take your advice," decided Page.

Hugo Martin, coming aft to greet his wife, met them.

"Get that fancy gangplank over the bow," ordered Holm. "Between breakers we can almost walk ashore with dry feet—not that mine are dry now." Ruefully he looked down at his torn boots.

"Never mind," said Page. "I'll buy you a better pair than those."

Holm looked up the beach to O'Brien's advancing figure.

"While you're at it, you better buy that young fellow the best pair of gloves in California. I wrecked his in coming down that wire cable."

"He'll get all the gloves he wants," promised Page.

"Fine. Hey, cook," ordered Holm, "throw a little kerosene on the fire and boil a pot of coffee. We've got work to do."

"Hadn't we better get ashore while the getting is good?" queried Page.

"Aw, we're safe in church here—or will be as soon as we get that kedge ashore. I wrecked this vessel—and made a good job of it—and will make a better one by salvaging her again. She's a stout little craft and is worth it. That thump on the sand didn't hurt her any. Opened maybe a seam or two at the worst."

INCLUDING O'Brien, as well as Holm and Page, there were eleven men to lend their hands at dragging an eight-hundred-pound kedge anchor to a point about fifty yards inland, where one fluke was buried deep in a hole dug in the sand. The hawser that had been taken ashore by Holm's order was made fast to the anchor ring. Between waves, several of the crew climbed back aboard, the cook with them. A few turns around the capstan, and the hawser was hove taut.

"The main idea," explained Holm as he stood shivering on the beach with Page and Mrs. Martin, "is to keep the vessel where she is till the gale blows out. Then send a crew of men with a steam shovel up here on a scow schooner. Build a dam across the stream farther up this valley. Let the steam shovel dig a new creek channel down to the vessel. Throw some kind of a bulkhead across the dry creek bed. Then dynamite the dam, and the flood will wash the schooner right back into the sea. It's so simple that a child could do it. And I'll bet the whole job won't cost two thousand dollars."

"That's the third thing you hadn't guessed, daddy," laughed Dorothy. "Captain Holm is an engineer, too."

"No, ma'am," said Holm, almost blushing, "I stole that idea. I seen it done once up north."

The wind had not lessened, but the rain had ceased. The crew, with a few of their most valued possessions, one by one dropped down into the wash of the surf and waded ashore. The cook made the trip with a huge tin pot filled with hot coffee. He had insulated the hot handle with the top of a flour sack; in the bottom of the bag rattled a dozen cups, agate and tin. Hugo Martin was the last man to leave and brought with him two flasks of whisky from the medicine chest.

THERE on the beach they fortified themselves with unsweetened coffee-royals, Captain Holm keeping one eye on the schooner and the line leading to the kedge.

"She'll stay," he announced. "At high tide tonight she may swing around beam on, but she won't pound much. She'll be high and dry at low tide in calm weather."

"Can you salvage her?" asked the cook.

"Yes, she'll slide off easy."

"I'm going back aboard—to stay," announced the cook. "That young guy—" pointing to O'Brien—"told me it was a six-mile walk to get anywhere. I can't make six miles—with my bad leg."

"Good idea, to keep a watchman aboard," said Page. "Your wages go right on, if you have the nerve to take a chance on the schooner's going to pieces in the surf."

"I'd rather chance that than chance walking six miles, sir. So long, boys; I'm getting back to dry out at the galley fire."

"I'd like to stay with him. Six miles don't look good to me, either," declared Page, "but I've got to get back to San Francisco. Let's start."

"It's six miles to my car," O'Brien told him. "It's an old five-passenger machine. I've just counted eleven heads. I don't know how far the old heap will run with that load aboard, but we can try it. We'll sure be crowded. Follow me." He started out.

They fell into groups and couples as they headed up the valley. Page walked with Holm. Behind them came Martin and his wife. Page searched an inside pocket and pulled out a leather cigar case. Two smokes were left. He handed one to Captain Holm.

"Now, daddy, don't," came the voice of Mrs. Martin. "You smoked your head off in the cabin this morning—and I never said a word. Your heart isn't *too* strong, and you'll need all your wind now. Put that cigar back in your pocket!"

"Listen, young lady," answered her father. "You've got a birthday coming. And you expect a nifty little coupé, don't you?"

She was forced to laugh as she answered, "Yes."

"In order to get your fondest wishes realized, you'll have to be a good girl. And a good girl won't say a word when her father wants to smoke."

"All right, daddy—but I was only speaking for your good. I won't say another word about it."

"All right, young lady; put it in writing and I'll consider the proposition." He snapped open a patent lighter and managed to keep the wick aflame long enough to touch off the two cigars.

"That's the way to handle women," grinned Page. "She lays it all over Martin, but I lay down the law to her."

Holm said nothing, but was thinking fast. Finally he repeated under his breath: "—lay down the law to her."

"What'd you say?" inquired Page.

"Oh!" startled. "I was wonderin' if your offer for me to take over your new steamer next year still holds good."

"You bet it does! Gus, I'll be a happy man if you'll go into steam. I'm glad you've changed your mind."

"It ain't changed, yet," cautiously. "But wait till I get home and talk it over with Mrs. Holm. I've been thinkin' it over, that's all."

"You're thinking along the right line, at last, Gus. Keep it up."

IT WAS eleven-thirty that night when Captain Holm quietly entered the bungalow and made his way upstairs to where his wife, awakened and propped up on one elbow, was ready to get a few words out of her system.

"Gus Holm, *where have you been?*" was her greeting.

"That's none of your business. I'll tell you when I get ready. You get up! I want a big swig of that birthday brandy you hid away, and then you heat some water. I've walked twelve miles today in rubber boots, with the boots all wet inside. Now, that I'm home *I want service.*"

"Gus, you've been drinking!" accusingly.

"Shut up! I'm laying down the law now, and you'd better be a good girl."

LIKE a person in a trance, Mrs. Holm rose, put her feet into slippers and donned a dressing-robe. In a dazed, fumbling way she dug out the brandy bottle from the hiding place in a closet and handed it to Gus. Her jaw dropped as though she were starting to speak. But she said nothing. She hurried down stairs to light the gas in the kitchen.

Holm painfully removed the shoes, into which he had with equal pain managed to squeeze his swollen feet upon reaching Okiah. The slashed boots he had discarded. Holm's lips were moving, as though he were rehearsing a part as he slowly muttered.

"Lay down the law to 'em. It's worked so far. It worked with Mr. Page, but I notice he sort of bribed her with a coop—I guess that's some kind of automobile. I can't give Tinka a coop, but I can give her something she'll appreciate more." Gus held the brandy bottle to his lips and let two ounces gurgle down—to prevent a cold.

"Now he told her to put it in writing," he soliloquized. "I wonder if he really meant that? Maybe that's the trick in handling women that I've overlooked. I'll try it." In bare feet he went down the stairs to the kitchen.

His wife was placing a coffee pot on a lighted gas burner. Over another, with the flame turned high, stood the hot water kettle.

"Gus, you ought to be ashamed of yourself—coming home drunk this way. I came down here in order to shut you up—so you wouldn't wake the children. I don't want them to think bad of their father. Here I've been a good wife all these years and made a home for you, and you—"

"You haven't!" interrupted Gus.

"Haven't what?"

"Made a home for me! It's a place I hate coming to. You've been a good wife—I can't deny that—***but you haven't made a home!***"

"Gus! Sober up! Don't raise your voice that way!"

"Sober up!" snorted Holm. He dropped into a chair. "Look at my feet. For the first time in my life I wrecked a vessel—and done it deliberate. I had to walk twelve miles to do it. Take a look at my feet. I want to wash them. Then you get out some medicine to heal them up. I won't be able to get shoes on tomorrow."

"You wrecked a vessel?" In horror. "Think of the talk! Does any one know you did it? Will they—"

"Aw, shut up!" wearily. "I'm tired of this silly gab. If I wrecked a vessel, of course they know I did it. I'm tired. A young fellow today told me I'm not as young as I used to be. He's right, for I'm all stove up—and feel worse. I'm repeating what I said: you haven't made a home for me."

"Gus, you—"

"Get a pencil and paper! We're going to have a business deal right now. We'll put it in writing."

Dumbfounded, amazed, but curious, she obtained writing materials.

"Now set down what I say," ordered Gus. Weaving in what scraps of legal and other phraseology he could recall, he began to dictate:

"I hereby agree to purchase immediately two spittoons and to keep them handy for the use of my husband, Gus Holm, whenever he is around and chewing tobacco and needs a spittoon."

"Gus, you—"

"Just keep writing," ordered Gus. "Don't talk, and your eyes will be opened wide when you get through.

"Furthermore, I agree that the happiness of my husband and his feeling that his wife is really making a home for him is of greater importance than the welfare of curtains and rugs. He may smoke wherever and whenever he so desires, with no word of complaint from me."

"Gus," she started.

"Got that down?" interrupted Gus. She nodded. "Then just keep writing.

"All this is contingent upon my husband, Gus Holm, making a consciousness effort—"

"Consciousness isn't the right word," she put in.

Gus scratched his head. "Maybe you're

right, Tinka. I guess that 'conscienceless' is the word." A pause. "Got that?"

"Yes." Curiously.

"A conscienceless effort to stop using cuss words in front of the kids—no, make it children instead of kids. This agreement on my part to make this house a real home for my husband is also contingent upon his forgetting his shell-backed ideas to the effect that the deck of a windjammer is the only place for a real seaman, and his agreeing to go into steam. Furthermore, I am to understand that my husband, Gus Holm, is to command, next year, an eight-thousand-ton steamer—as promised him by Elwood Page.

"To this I hereby put my hand and seal, so help me, God."

Holm had been speaking very, very slowly. He waited until the pencil ceased to move and his wife looked at him.

"Got all that down?" he demanded. Then he noticed the expression on her face. "What's the matter?" gruffly.

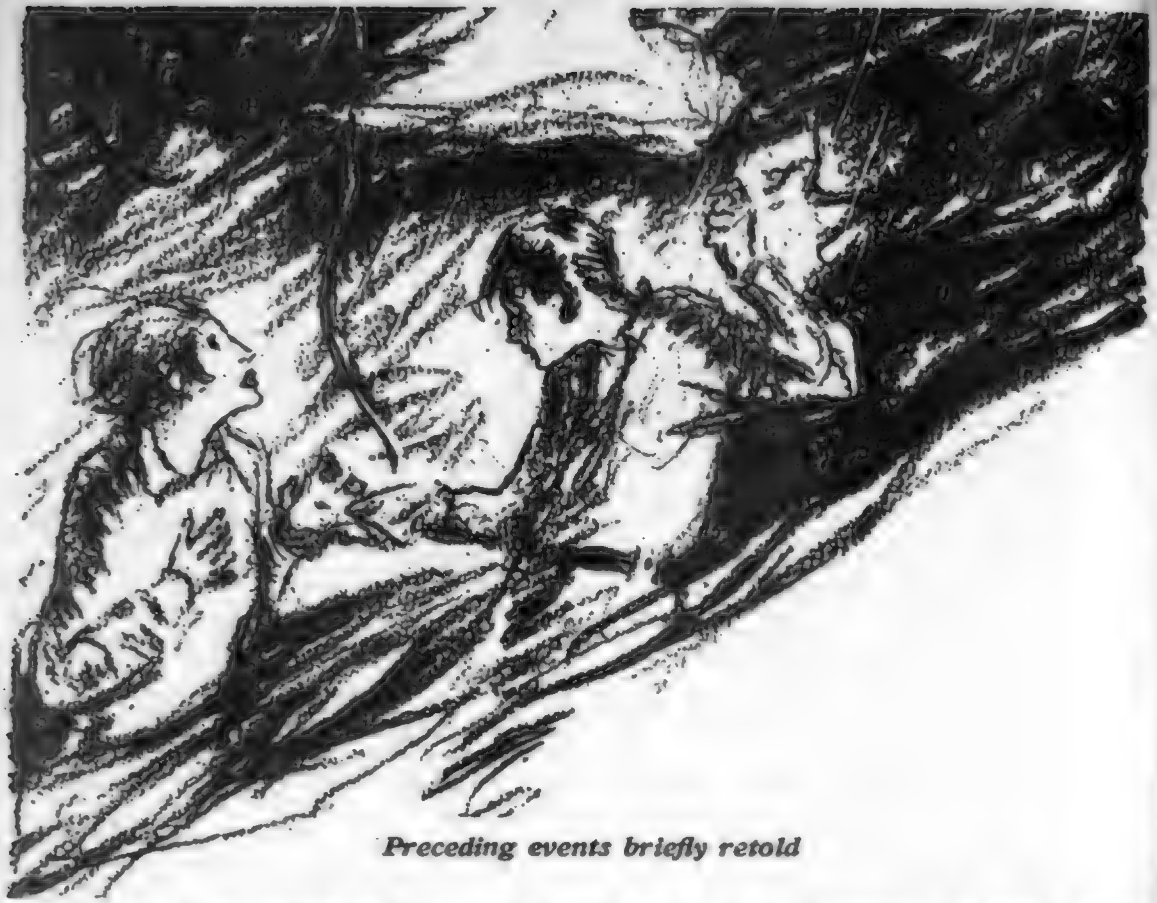
"Oh, Gus, do you mean this?" A hint of tears, tears of joy.

"Yeh, if you'll sign it, I'll go into steam—but it ain't right!"

Captain Dingle—Hugh Pendexter
Ared White

Among the writers of short stories next month, you'll find those three names prominent

Captain Dingle's story is called "Water"; Hugh Pendexter calls his stunning Western story "The Way of Billy McQueen"; Ared White's new war story is entitled "Caissons".



Preceding events briefly retold

Philip Amory, war veteran and proprietor of a trading-post in Daru, Papua, returning from Cairns on a B. P. boat, rescued Jinny Treacher, a chorus girl, from sharks. This deed won him Jinny's heart and also the affection of Pia Laurier, a fellow passenger and the daughter of wealthy Australians.

Amory became madly in love with Pia, but realized he was in no social or financial position to press his suit. Furthermore he learned from the ship gossip that Pia is engaged to a Sir Richard Fanshawe. On leaving the ship at Thursday Island, Amory meets Fanshawe who is coming on board.

The name Fanshawe means little to Amory, but the glimpse he got of him made him feel sure he had seen the man before. He could not get this thought out of his mind during the next few weeks at Daru.

On an evening, when two of the Assistant Resident Magistrates were in, Bassett, the Resident Magistrate invited Amory, called Black Sheep in Daru, "mostly because his eyes are black, and his hair, and partly because he is a decent sort of chap," to dinner. Besides the expected guests an Englishman named Spicer was present, a pompous ass and the forerunner of another so-called expedition going from Papua to the other side. Spicer explained he was to organize the party while awaiting his chief, Sir Richard Fanshawe. At the mention of Fanshawe's name from another's lips, Amory's memory gets a jolt—he remembers with horror when and where he saw Fanshawe before.

A night several years previous his boat was driven ashore on an island then unknown to him. He found it to be Iota, the leper colony. That night he saw Fanshawe make his escape from this island.

Thus Amory is nearly mad, knowing Pia Laurier intends to marry Fanshawe, the leper. He bolts from Bassett's house, but finally returns after the others have left, to acquaint Bassett with these strange facts. Bassett tells him his only course is to notify Pia's parents.

To do this Amory goes across to Thursday Island where he cables Pia's father to delay the marriage. While there he meets Jinny Treacher again who informs him that Fanshawe has arrived and knows his secret of the gold out back, and plans to beat him to it. At this news, Amory makes hurried preparations to start out back himself, to win the race for gold.

Amory arrived off Port Moresby on the evening of the third day. Knowing he could not get through the customs and quarantine that night he decided to camp on Fisherman's Island rather than sleep aboard the little cutter.

He awoke in one of the deserted shacks the next morning to find Sir Richard Fanshawe confronting him. Fanshawe informed him that he and Pia were to be married that day in Port Moresby and honeymoon on Fisherman's Island. Amory hurried to his boat, determined to make Port Moresby in time to stop the wedding. Fanshawe followed him in a speed boat, bearing down on him apparently determined on cutting his craft in two, thus putting an end forever to Amory's story of his escape from the leper colony.

Amory waited until Fanshawe's boat was almost upon him, then seized his rifle and shot him. Fanshawe dropped dead over the side of his boat into the shark-infested sea. Amory goes to Port Moresby. Fanshawe's abandoned boat is found later in the day and general gossip has it that he fell overboard, probably while trying to pull seaweed out

Concluding BEATRICE GRIMSHAW'S *Romance of Earth's Darkest Places*

Black Sheep's GOLD

of his propeller, and sharks got him. No suspicion is attached to Amory.

Amory finds Pia. She is not particularly grieved at Sir Richard's death, for as she admits, she was going to marry him chiefly out of pique at Amory's inattention. Amory tells Pia of the trip he is taking out back and what he expects to find there.

On the morning of the fifth day of his trip, Amory discovered Jinny Treacher entering his camp in a half-starved, ragged and woebegone condition. She says she has followed him—wants to go on with him. This of course is impossible and as Jinny's porters have deserted, Amory dejectedly turns to take Jinny back to civilization.

After several days on the back trail along the river they are met by Bassett in the government launch. He has started out to find Jinny as report has come to him of her foolhardy trip. Amory and Jinny both go aboard Bassett's launch for Amory has now used up his precious supplies and must reoutfit before again attempting to find the gold out back.

Amory leads his second expedition into Tatatata and there finds the gold he has so eagerly sought. After he has located his claim, which includes all worthwhile ground, Spicer and Caxon arrive. The two parties join forces and start homeward.

At the Romilly River they are met by two parties, Pia's and Bassett's who have been awaiting their arrival. Bassett keeps in the background and Pia pulls Amory aside and persuades him to marry her then and there. Amory, suspecting nothing but a girlish whim in the odd setting Pia has selected, delightedly agrees and the ceremony is performed at once.

Bassett then steps forward and arrests Amory for the murder of Fanshawe. They all go to Port Moresby where Amory records his claim and is tried for murder. He is convicted for manslaughter and is sentenced to five years in prison. He sends some friends back to his claim to do the assessment work and begins his sentence in the Koki jail.

I PASS over months—I can not remember for certain how many; it may have been about six—and come to a day when it was visiting day, and Pia, darling, ever patient Pia, was awaiting below at the gate of the palm avenue, until the hour when she might justly climb the hill. The months had changed her, as no doubt they had changed me; but my beauty wasn't anything to boast of, so nobody need have wept over me, as I could almost have wept over her, each time I saw her anew. Always, she was a little thinner, always the lovely apple-round of her young cheek was a little more wasted, like a fruit that frosts have prematurely touched; always, the blue shadow under her blue eyes had spread, since I saw her last, and the white bones in her wrists were whiter; easier to be counted.

She was gay, almost merry, before me; merry with the self-mastery taught the well-bred girl as letters and languages are taught her, she strove to put aside the weariness, loneliness, despair, that ravaged her heart, even as they ravaged mine, and show a bright face throughout our little hour. We may both have been the better for our pretences; I can not say; I only know that they were hard to keep up.

Pia's parents, I knew, maintained a ceaseless siege of her; Mrs. Laurier had even visited Port Moresby, more or less incognito, had practically gone down on her knees to Pia, begging her, as she valued the affection of her people, her place in society, her immortal welfare (characteristically, by Mrs. Laurier, placed last) to leave the black sheep into whose pastures she had so unfortunately strayed, and return to her own fold. It was impossible, according to Mrs. Laurier, for any sane girl to spend five years, or even four, hanging about the gates of a gaol, waiting for criminals. It would be easy—according to Mrs. Laurier—to "manage" a divorce. She was sure I wouldn't be unreasonable. Evidence could always be arranged. And anyhow, she, and Pia's father—who had received a simply disgraceful letter about poor Sir Richard from the young man, a letter full of indecency and lies—would not think of allowing the thing to continue.

So Mrs. Laurier. Pia in reply—but I will let her speak for herself.

"Mum almost went on her knees. I was most frightfully sorry. I petted her, and told her she mustn't worry so; I asked her how she'd have felt if father—but that made her worse; she said I mustn't compare him to—to—never mind."

"I don't," I assured her. "There's only one person on earth I mind, and that's Mrs. Laurier's daughter." But all the same, I was sorry for my mother-in-law. According to her lights, I felt she was justified.

"She said some more about criminals. And I told her that you had made yourself a criminal for me. And she said that didn't matter; she understood how I felt—oh, mum isn't half bad, when you know her—but she said the point was how would society feel? and that I was young, and didn't know what I was giving up, and that I must, simply must, come back with her by the return *Morninda* and that it wouldn't be too late; I could rebuild my life; my people would stand by me. . . . She is a quite good little mother, you know, Phil, even if— Well, I told her that I was twenty-one, and had my aunt's money, and I was very sorry, but I must judge for myself. I wanted to cry, dreadfully, but I didn't, you daren't show weakness to mum; she—she encroaches. . . . Instead, I quoted that thing from the Bible—'Whither thou goest, I will go, and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. The Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.' I was shaking all over when I said it, Phil. It was like pronouncing vows. And mother—"

"What did she—"

"You can't down mum. She listened as if she had been at church, and then she said, in that clipped way of hers—'Very nice, my dear; but don't forget that all that was said by Ruth to her mother-in-law, not her husband; and don't forget that by and by she married Boaz'—like a shot!"

I couldn't help myself, I laughed. And Head Gaoler Holly (sometimes that man was nearly human) got so far behind his newspaper, and cleared his throat so much and noisily that—Well, what would you have done?

"YOU had something more to tell me," I reminded her, when the newspaper was folded again, and Holly had finished gargling with his feelings, and Pia's hat had resumed its usual, saucy angle over one eye.

"Yes," she said, suddenly grave. "I had; I should have known about it and told you before, if mum's visit hadn't put things out so. Until she was gone, she simply absorbed me, and I didn't—Phil, I'm afraid it's something serious."

"Is it about—"

"The gold claim—yes, it is. I made as much as I could of that to mum, but you can't get the better of her—she shoots so straight—she went to the point more than I'd dared to do myself, and said—'All very well, and people will forgive most things to millions, but my good girl,' she said, 'do you think that gold's going to lie loose till he's ready to pick it up?' And I said, 'He's sent a friend to look after it.' And she said 'I understand' (mum does get to know everything) 'that a goldfield's been proclaimed, and half the bad characters of Australia are there; what do you think's going to happen to a fortune left lying loose? Don't tell me," she said. One never does tell her; she always does the telling, and she's so right—except about you."

"She's right there, if you could see it," I told her. "Thank God you can't. But have you heard anything definite?"

"Only since she went. Yesterday. A boat came in from the West, and there were a lot of men who hadn't done well, and were going away again. But they said some had done well; and they said—I heard them; I listened like a—like a housemaid."

"What did they say?" I was prepared for misfortune now.

"They said that Smithson—the man you sent—was drinking. And somebody asked them 'What's he drinking? Gin-slings?' And they laughed most frightfully, and I couldn't hear any more. But it sounded badly, Phil. I can't tell you how glad I was that today was visiting day; I thought you ought to hear it at once."

I thought so too; her information troubled me more than I chose to say. Smithson had been working the claim satisfactorily enough. Gold in various amounts had been paid into the bank for me, my partner taking his agreed percentage. So far, so good. But the last payments had been, undoubtedly very far spaced out; and the written reports sent in from time to time, were diminishing both in number and in size.

They had, at first, included various bits of news about the field, which to me, in my prison silence, came pleasantly as the sound of the Romilly River running beneath its palms, and the mountain winds singing in the Pia Laurier Range. Solitude of Tatatata was solitude no longer; the unblazed track was trampled by scores of miners and hundreds of carriers; a store had been put up on the field, and another at the river mouth; men from every Australian goldfield were trying their fortune and some were making it—but no one had struck anything, no one even hoped for anything, as rich as the prospecting claim that belonged to me. "I'm sleeping right on the claim at night," Smithson had said. "I and the boys. We're doing wonderful, but we have to be careful nobody goes and jumps in on us. The Emperor turned up here a while ago," ran another letter (I did not need a translation of that name) "What do you think, he's married Genevieve Treacher, the one they call Gin-Sling. They've got three tents for themselves, bedroom dressing-room, and dining-room, and his boys are camping under the rocks. You never saw the like of it. I reckon she's too good for him. Caxon is here too. He and the Emperor are working partners. I think they've got a decent claim, but of course nobody has anything the like of yours. God's truth, Amory I get the wind up sometimes when I think of what's in this bit of gravel; if it was on the Klondike I'd have been murdered weeks ago. Send me up a good dog if you can get one, they're worth a dozen sentries at night."

Then a long period of silence. Then a brief letter, mentioning the dispatch of another parcel of gold, and saying little else. "The rain's come on something cruel," it ended. "I feel sometimes as if I was going out of my mind with it, and the other things. But don't you worry, I'm sticking on the job."

AFTER that came silence again. I had not heard from Smithson for two months now. And on the top of it came Pia's news that he was drinking.

Then it was that I felt, for the first time, the full weight of my chain. Something was wrong at Tatatata; I knew that as surely as if I had been there to see. The pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, so wonderfully found, was in peril. With it was imperilled all the dignity, all the security, of my future life; all the excuse I had for dragging Pia down to the level of a convicted felon. As her mother had truly told her, it made no difference whatever that I had become a felon for her sake; the world—her world—would forget that as surely as it would remember the stain. If no one would forget, however, much, to a very wealthy man, might be forgiven; at least, I hoped so; I had based my whole future scheme of existence on that idea. And now, Smithson, whom I had trusted as I would have trusted myself, in whose hands lay my whole fortune, was failing. And I must stay here; stay in the pebbled prison yard and the foolish chicken-wired cell; work on the jetty, walk a few yards out and back, see the white road and the blue sea before me, and know that for nearly four years, at the very best, I could not hope to tread the one or sail the other. Not free, not free!

I think that all the sorrows of all the prisoners in the world flowed over me in that brief minute when I sat silent, under Pia's troubled eyes, trying to pull myself together and think what must be done. I was not used to working through other people's brains and eyes; getting others to take my risks or look after my interests for me. Always, decision, action, had followed on thought as sunlight follows dawn; it had been a wish and a step, a word and a blow, with me. Now, I was moving in a medium that I did not understand. Whom could I trust, since I could not act for myself, and Smithson, the trusted, was falling to the triple lure of woman, drink, and gold? How could I know that the next man I might appoint would be any better?

Truly, the shine of the gold of Tatatata grew dim, in that moment; the road of life that was to have been lit by its warm glow, turned suddenly gray and cold.

I suppose the silence that had fallen between us may have lasted a minute or so. It was broken by Head Gaoler Holly, who, with many cracklings and unfoldings of his newspaper, remarked briefly—"Time up in two minutes." And we became conscious that all we had to say must be speedily said. For two weeks I could have no letter, for a month I could see Pia no more. If she was to do anything for me—and it was becoming plain that by nobody else could anything be done—then we must settle it at once.

But how? The time was almost out. Head Gaoler Holly was folding up his paper, rising from his seat. Pia, her little pink hat drawn saucily sidewise over her sleek hair, her pink frock fluttering in the breeze that blew through the open room—Pia, surely the prettiest, daintiest picture that had ever brightened that sad place—was already putting up a face like a sweet pale rose, for our last kiss. I took it, I held her for a moment closer than usual, moved by some indefinable, dark presentiment. I found words, somehow, at the last moment; words hurried, tumbling over one another. "Take out a power of attorney for me," I said. "They'll let me sign it, inquire about so-and-so, and so-and-so" (I gave her a few names), "and find which of them will take Smithson's place. He'll have to go up at once; don't wait for letters to me. Write as soon as you can. Good-by, little love." (She was near as tall as I, but the adjective came naturally; Pia would always be "little" to any one who loved her.) "Take care—"

"Time up," said Head Gaoler Holly.

IT RAINED a great deal during the next few weeks; work outside was largely suspended, and odd jobs of painting, cleaning, "sailorizing" generally, took up the tiresome hours. More than ever, in the absence of regular outdoor work, with its glimpses of the free wide world, did I long for letter day. But when my letter came at last it brought no comfort with it, rather distress and dismay. The power of attorney had come made out for Pia; I had wondered a little but signed it. And now the letter told me that Pia had gone to Tatatata herself.

"You mustn't worry about me," she wrote. "There was nothing else to do. From all I can hear, it's a woman, and only a woman, who is wanted to look after your interests just now. I wish I could have seen you again before I leave, but it would mean too long delay. Don't worry about me; the place is well opened up, and the warden sees that order is kept. I may be a good while; no knowing what I shall find. Good-by, my very dearest. Give my love to the prince if he comes along. I'm sorry I shan't be there to meet him; he is a perfect duck. They say he's going to be married now—lucky princess! But I wouldn't change my own prince for him. . . ."

I had plenty of leisure, in the too long nights, to con over her letter again and again; try to read between the lines of it, and guess at certain things she had not openly stated. "Only a woman—" What could be meant by that? I pondered, wondered, decided that Pia must be referring, in veiled terms, to her love for me, which indeed made her an eager and energetic guardian of our fortunes. The reference to the "prince," I understood; but it cut sharply despite that pretty saying about her "own prince," for I knew that the forthcoming visit of one of England's best-loved royalties would only, for me, add to the weight of the invisible fetters I carried night and day.

To know that the town was holding festival, to see, from the high, fenced yard of the gaol, mast a-flutter with flags, new archways built over roads; to hear the gun-salutes and the very cheers, and know oneself set apart from it all, not able even to stand in the crowd and send one's hat and one's heart up in a shout for old England and her Prince — this hurt my sense of Empire; (which perhaps was more real, if a bit less theatrical than Spicer's) made the hard state of prisoner, in anticipation somewhat harder. But I put the thought away; determined not to think about princes and royal visits, which could mean nothing to me.

What follows, I gained from Pia, long after all was past.

CHAPTER XII

NEAR sunset, Pia came to the last camping place but one, before the field of Tatatata.

The clearing was deserted; gray skeletons of tents, white circles of ashes where fires had been, alone distinguished it from any other open space in the great forest. The sun had gone behind the trees; green light still fell from above, as into a deep well-top, but at the bottom of the clearing it was almost dark.

Pia was not alone; the government authorities had sent with her an escort of armed constabulary, since a certain number of these were due to go up to the field in any case. Placed in charge of an old and trustworthy sergeant, they had served and guarded her faithfully through the trip—"savages in serge," but true to their salt—and on this last night but one, they were very merry over the near fulfillment of their task. It was some credit to them, and to Sergeant Simoi too, they felt, that they had brought the *sinabada* (lady) safe through all the perils and fatigues of the wild bush, and almost reached the field. Several times along the road, the leading police, urged thereto by hurried signs from Simoi, had kicked out of sight a huddled mass of bones—spine, thighs, body and arm bones; never a skull among them—where some luckless carrier, speared or shot from the bush, had met his end. Once or twice Pia herself had paused to look at an overgrown mound with a rude cross leaning askew on it; to ask the name of the white man who lay there; how he had met his end.

"I think he die of somethings," was all Simoi's answer. Why trouble the white *sinabada* with tales of blackwater fever, dysentery, or death by arrow? Why tell her that not all of those graves contained heads as well as bodies? She might begin to cry, though she had been brave up till now. She might want to be taken back to Port Moresby. And he, Sergeant Simoi was anxious to get on to Tatatata—there was plenty of pig there.

He did not encourage wandering away from the camp. The government had "talked strong" to him, before he left, regarding the lady's safety, and all that must be done to ensure it. If anything were to happen to her, it would be he, and his police, who would probably have cause to do crying.

So, when they were putting up the tents in this last camping ground but one (the track was all marked out with halting-places now, bad spots bridged, dangerous cliffs hung with ladders of bush rope) Simoi, seeing the lady at the edge of the clearing, called out to her to be cautious.

"You no go walk-about, *sinabada*," he pleaded. "S'pose you wante flower, me and my police we gettem flenty. By'-n'by one big bush fig he coming, he altogether *kai-kai* (eat) you."

"There are no pigs about, and I don't want flowers," came Pia's clear voice, just a little tired. "Thank you, Sergeant Simoi, I am only looking at that funny light in the bush."

"What-name light, *sinabada?*"

"I don't know what it is. It seems like a very big tent, some way off. And I think I heard—but that's impossible."

"What you think you hearem?"

"Corks," replied Pia. "Corks being pulled —and singing."

"*Sinabada*, me think you lie," replied the sergeant, courteously using the native fashion of expressing astonishment. Then, suddenly, slapping his thigh, and leaping—"By ——, *sinabada*, you no lie, me hearem too. What-fashion this?" (what does this mean?)

"We'd better go and see," said the girl.

"Me and you," declared the sergeant, "we go see. You black cows there," addressing the constables, "you lightem pire, cook some tin pish (tinned fish). I beggle-pardle, *sinabada*, I walk first." He set his sturdy bulk in front, and, by the last faint glow of twilight, began cutting a path through the forest, Pia following. A few minutes later, the two came out on the edges of a second clearing; one that seemed to have been made for the sole accommodation of a great white tent that stood in the middle of it; a tent finer than most of those in use in Papuan travel; fitted with a wide sheltering fly, and a groundcloth that projected a yard beyond the door. The doorway was wide, the doorflaps were hooked back. One could see right into the tent, and the sight—for that place, and that time—was amazing.

THERE was a table inside, covered with a white cloth. On it were plates of food, tinned delicacies of all sorts; wild boar from the forest; wild turkey, okari nuts, mushrooms. There were glasses. There were bottles; among them the long-necked bottle with the golden helmet, that shouts, wherever it is seen, of money, of recklessness, of youth and gaiety and the festive spirit.

All were there. Youth and gaiety and recklessness were embodied, if ever human form expressed them, by the limber, red-headed figure of a girl, who, gaudily dressed, hung over a man lying on a cushioned deck chair. Money showed in every item of the costly outfit; and the festive spirit, if expressible by song, certainly received full impulse, for the girl, at the top of her not unmusical voice, was chanting the last revue success, while the man, an emptied glass dropping from his fingers, wailed loudly and interminably that classic of the sentimentally drunk—"Annie Laurie."

Outside the silence, the stars, black Papua.

To Pia, standing a little way off, within the shadows of the forest, the whole strange scene looked like some vivid cinema picture. Scarcely more real than a film play, too, it seemed, so reasonless, impossible, was the sight of this luxurious tent, in a place inhabited commonly by wild boars, snakes and cassowaries alone. Sergeant Simoi, staring until his treacle-brown eyes almost started from their sockets, gave forth his opinion candidly—

"I think this-one too much *puri-puri* (magic), *sinabada*. More better you-me (we) no stop." Head-hunters, cannibals, the ambush and the spear-pit, never shook the iron nerve of the old sergeant; such things were in the day's work of any policeman. But sorcery—that was a different matter.

"No good," he added conclusively.

"Hush, Sergeant," warned the girl. "I want to find out about this." For into her mind had crept a conviction, born she knew now how, warning her that this thing had to do with the object of her journey.

"Who is the white man?" she whispered. She could see his face now; he was half-sitting, half-lolling, on the cushioned deck chair; he had stopped his song at last, and was listening to the girl, who had started afresh, and was making the primeval forest ring to her invocation of "Barney Goo-goo, of the goo-goo, goo-goo eyes."

Simoi pulled himself together, realized that there was no sorcery here, and became at once the smart, non-commissioned officer of every day.

"I think," he said cautiously, "name belong him Si-misson."

"Simisson? Oh?—Smithson! Sergeant, are you sure?"

"Me savvy. Me too much dam savvy. Bee-fore" (some time ago) "him take away one girl belong my village. Fashion belong him, *sinabada*" (it is his way). "Him too much likem girl, likem plenty bottle good-luck" (bottles of whisky).

"I know," said Pia musingly, "that Phil thought he was sober and reliable."

"Him all right, *sinabada*, suppose nobody showem girl along him, showem good-luck along him. Suppose girl, goodluck showem this man, he 'nother kind." (Untranslatable idiom, suggesting change of character.)

"He's not the only one," commented, dryly, society's pet child. "I think I know who the girl is now. I've seen her before. Only for Phil, she would be at the bottom of the sea."

"*Sinabada*," advised the sergeant, "no good you pullem one man, one woman, out along salt-water. Suppose he die, he die. Suppose he no die, by-'n'-by he makem bad along you. True, *sinabada*."

"There's something in all superstitions," agreed Pia. "Now, Sergeant, you and I are going to talk to these people."

"Me and you, we go," answered the sergeant, swelling out his chest. Some idea of sorcery still lingered in his mind, but it was clear that duty called him to accompany the white *sinabada*. Mechanically he touched the long bayonet-knife that swung in its sheath at his hip. For infighting, Sergeant Simoi loved the bayonet above all other weapons.

FROM the gloom of the forest outside, the tent looked vivid, clear, a small brightly set stage. From the tent, the forest was naught but all surrounding dusky sea.

To the pair within, drunkenly singing, drunkenly caressing one another, the sight of Pia in the open doorway, Pia slim, erect, rigid as a young soldier in her sporting khaki, Pia with cold accusing eyes beneath a heavy patrol helmet, came as a disturbing vision from some other world. They sprang apart, and it would be hard to say whether the man or the girl uttered the foulest words.

"You shuttem head belong you," bellowed Sergeant Simoi, enraged. "What name (why) you talk bad along my *sinabada?* By-'n'-by me break you froat along bayonet."

"That's enough, Sergeant," warned Pia. "Wait outside for me." She stepped into the tent, and fixed a steady accusing gaze on Smithson, who, suddenly sobered, had risen to his feet. "It's the missis, by ——" he muttered, leaning one hand on the disordered supper table, and staring under his tattered locks of hair.

"Mr. Smithson," asked Pia, with cold courtesy, "will you kindly tell me why you are not at my husband's claim?"

"Plenty of time," retorted Smithson, picking up courage, under a secret nudge from Jinny. "Going back to it when I get good and ready."

"I believe you are a goldminer. Don't you know that a claim is forfeited if left without just cause for thirty days?"

"He don't need you to learn him," came Jinny's shrill voice. Pia did not ignore her. She turned toward Jinny, and sent her a glance, in which pity, kindness and a certain fear—the chaste woman's irrepressible fear of the unchaste—were strangely mingled. "You are Mrs. Spicer," she said. "I'm sorry to see you encouraging this man in neglect of his duty."

"Mrs. Spicer as much as Mrs. Anybody," said Jinny. "More Mrs. Spicer than you're Mrs. Amory, by all accounts." She laughed coarsely.

Pia ignored that. She was feeling for her feet in this strange medium. She remembered Jinny—remembered her well. How the girl had altered since those days on the great liner! How her beauty had coarsened, how the slim, firm graces of her dancer's figure had slackened into ugly lines! So thin was Jinny, always, that perfect condition was her only chance of grace. It had gone; the grace was going with it; youth and beauty, too soon were passing away from Genevieve Treacher. In the first moment, Pia could not account for so great a change. But Jinny, uncomfortable beneath that pitying gaze, seized her half-filled champagne glass, and emptied it at a gulp, hoarsely crying as she took it from her lips: "What's yours? Drink hearty, we'll soon be dead!" And Pia saw that the vice of Jinny's kind, long avoided, had caught her up at last. She was indeed "drinking hearty" now; she was even well on the way to fulfil the latter half of her famous war-cry.

"CHAMPAGNE for the lady," proclaimed Smithson, still not quite himself, though considerably sobered. He reached for a bottle.

"Thanks, no," fell from Pia's lips like an icicle. "You haven't told me yet, Mr. Smithson, why you come to be here. I might as well tell you that I hold my husband's power of attorney, and am going up to the field to act for him."

"I came to be here," answered Smithson, with painful effort, "because—I came to be here." He offered this brightly, as a complete explanation.

"We're prospecting," contributed Jinny, putting down her glass, and fixing a defiant stare upon Pia. "Me and he. There's other gold besides that on Tatatata, which don't belong to my friend anyhow. As for powers of attorney," she went on, hurriedly pouring out more wine, and keeping her face turned somewhat away—"I reckon this is a free country; I reckon my friend don't have to run when anybody whistles—even Mrs.—Philip—Amory." She loaded each word with contempt. If Pia, in her presence, was shaken, somewhat, by the fear of the chaste for the unchaste, Jinny, on her part, was consumed by the light woman's burning and perfectly genuine scorn for an innocent girl.

"Here, don't you ladies get qua'ling, over me," thickly said Smithson. It was pitch dark now, moonless; in the high circle of sky above the clearing, large serene stars looked down. A long way off, miles perhaps, they could hear a cassowary thundering on its fierce drum, calling to some spurred mate as savage as itself.

"No cause for qua'ling," went on Smithson. Supporting himself by the tent-poles, he had moved over toward the door; was looking owlishly, yet with a curious interest, at the velvet, star-besprinkled sky. "I came away," he said, "because this lady wanted to go and fine gold mines. I let her go fine gol' mines all alone? Naw! She and me, and the whisky and the champagne—wha's that poetry about a jug of wine and a case of whisky, and Gin-Sling singin' alongside of you? She and me—and damn the new moon."

At that, Jinny, much the soberer of the two, let out a sudden shriek, flung herself half across the tent, and slapped her fingers on Smithson's babbling mouth. "Hold your tongue, fool," she cried. To Pia. "He don't mean anything. I mean, he means that the moon makes him worse than he is. It's like that with loonies of all sorts. He gets sort of wild. You know." She had pulled herself together with marvelous completeness; was lighting and smoking a cigaret. She did not look at Pia any more.

"Don't mind us," she said. "We're rough, but we're honest. Rough diamonds, me and him. You'll excuse us, please. I'll get him back to the field for you; I'm fed up with prospecting." She followed Pia's questioning gaze about the tent. "He would have all this," she said. "He blued every 'weight' he had at the store on the field, to make it comfortable like. I brought the cham," she added, with Jinny's queer bursts of truthfulness. "I made love to him, and got him to come away with me, because I wanted him to work for me; you can put that in your pipe and smoke it if you like." She stood with her hands on her lean hips, staring at Pia—staring hard, as one who defies you to guess what may be hidden behind his front of impenetrable brass. Over against the silks and splendors of Jinny, and the lean defiant arms, and the face, marred but beautiful still, Pia, straight, helmeted, armed, as a young Joan of Arc, with blue, pure eyes burning in a face of mountain snow, paused, still as the night outside, her mind on full stretch over this new problem. What had the moon to do with it?

There was small chance of finding out anything, here, in this reeking tent, from the half-drunk pair who were certainly not prospecting, whatever their business in the bush might be. Without a word, Pia turned and walked away, followed by the sergeant.

HOW cool the scented night, how divine the purity of the stars! She lingered a little on the way back to the camp. The carriers were noisy; she could hear them shouting and singing. It would be tiresome in camp; one could not think in the midst of such a noise. Still, the bush after dark, on the goldfields' track, was no place for loitering.

How they were shouting! Dancing too. When she came out into the open clearing she could see, by the light of the fires, dark forms whirling and leaping, as if possessed by demons. They made such a noise that, at first, she could not distinguish what they were singing, although some words seemed strangely familiar. Then, over the uncomprehended shouts of the Mambaré and Yassi-Yassi carriers, came loud and clear the cry of some Port Moresby boys—"Sail-O! Sail-O!"

Pia knew the custom of saluting the new moon with that cry. She glanced to westward, where the forest, sloping down, showed a wide stretch of sky. There, in the west, almost gone, hung one clear small strip of silver, like a light peeling dropped from some fairy fruit. New moon!

What had those people in the tent said about the moon? Why had Jinny Treacher struck Smithson, when he spoke of it? Why must she, Pia, know nothing about the moon—the moon which measured off months—

"Oh!" It was a sudden cry. Leaping over a hundred unnoticed links, her mind had sprung to the end of the chain of thought. She knew.

Thirty days of desertion, without due and sufficient cause, made void a claim. Smithson—who couldn't resist drink or girls—was here in the forest, two days away from Tatatata, with Jinny, and Jinny's (or Spicer's) cases of champagne. There were no calendars in the bush—drinkers' memories are treacherous. If you wanted to stay away thirty days, guessing wouldn't do. But if you did not guess, if you counted by something that wouldn't drop a day here or there; if you left at new moon, and gave over your reckoning to something that was sure to come back in exactly twenty-eight days, something that every native in sight would hail with salutations and loud cries—

then, you might be perfectly sure that you would stay away just long enough.

"Sergeant Simoi!" said Pia.

"Here—sir," snapped the sergeant, hand up.

"Go and get me one of Mr. Smithson's carriers."

"Yessir," replied Simoi, as if she had asked for a handkerchief, "I bring him dead or I bring him live, *sinabada*, Sir?"

"Alive, of course; and don't let any one see you getting him."

"Right, sir." The sergeant melted into the bush.

IT WAS some minutes before he returned, driving before him an extremely scared and very naked Papuan.

"Come on, you black cow," encouraged Simoi. "S'pose you no hurry up, me cut the guts out of you. You like I handcuff him, *sinabada?*"

"No, certainly not. Don't frighten him. Ask him when they left the field, and be sure you get the right answer."

"Me savvy," nodded Simoi. An interchange of question and answer followed.

"*Sinabada*," said the sergeant, saluting, "him say this man, this woman leavem Tatatata thass time the new moon come, bee-fore. Him leavem twel' o'clock, sun he stop-on-top."

"Is he quite certain?"

"Him say yes, savvy plenty, bee-cause all those boy he sing, he dance along new moon, firs' time he makem camp."

"Give him some tobacco, and let him go. Sergeant! Tell him not to talk about this."

"I tellem all right," proffered the sergeant, on returning. "I tellem I takem head belong him, cleanem head all same pish, smokem along pire, stickem him head up along my *dubu* (clubhouse) suppose him too much talk.

"Well, Sergeant?"

"Whassamasser?"

Tamer of horses is, commonly, judge of human beings. Pia looked into the face—anxious, kindly, shrewd—of the dark Kiwai sergeant, the "savage dressed in serge," and recognized a man. Simoi had sensed, without understanding, the crisis in which she found herself; was offering, blindfolded, his help.

"It's this, Sergeant," she said briefly. "Mr. Smithson was left to look out after my husband's gold. If he runs away from it for one moon and two days, another man can steal it; then there is no gold for my man, no gold for me. You understand?"

"I blankywell understand, *sinabada*," was the reply. "Whass you-me (we) going to do? You—me go and kill him tonight?"

"No, that wouldn't do any good. It's not as easy as that. . . . Sergeant, do you know the way to the field—I mean, know it well?"

"I no savvy him too much, *sinabada*. One carrier he savvy plenty, village belong him stop two day along bush."

"What! you've got a Tatatata man!"

"My word, yes, *sinabada*. Bee-fore, him killem one white man, along Tatatata road him go to gaol along Daru; this man he good man, he savvy plenty."

Pia had been long enough in the country to have small fear of the murderer; to know, moreover, that he might be invaluable in the present crisis.

"Get him here," she ordered.

Another wild, naked creature was herded up. This man, to all appearance as savage as the capture from Smithson's crowd, displayed, as soon as he began to speak, the educative effects of a sojourn in gaol—which, among wild Papuans, amounts to something like a university course.

"Yes," he said, in answer to the sergeant. "Me savvy load (road) too much. . . . Tatatata? To-morrow we walk we walk strong, 'nother day we walk, we walk, strong, night time we sleep, morning time sun he come up big, we come up along Tatatata, sun he go down, we come along gole fiel'."

"Twenty-eight days today," counted Pia. "Twenty-nine tomorrow. Thirty the day after. Thirty-one to arrive. . . . Sergeant! Ask him does he know another way—a shorter way."

"No savvy," said the carrier promptly. Pia watched him; he seemed, to her mind, a little too prompt.

"Offer double pay," she ordered.

"No savvy," was the result—not without a touch of temper.

Pia turned her back, and walked off to her tent. Her man, his fortune, were hanging in the balance.

The cat streak that hides in all women came to the surface. She became cruel, in defense of her own.

"Make him talk," she flung over her shoulder, as she went.

"My word, me blanky well make him," was the sergeant's reply. He reached for a strip of lawyer cane.

It was only a minute or two before the ex-murderer appeared, sulking, shaking, whimpering, driven by Simoi. "I can't cut the guts out of him proper, *sinabada*," said the sergeant courteously "bee-cause he make too much damnoise—don't want to bring plenty bushman along camp—all-a-same, me think he talk for you now."

Pia, sitting on her camp bed as on a bench of justice, questioned him, and the sergeant translated.

"Is there another road?"

Simoi replied, "Him say, yes. Plenty bad road, full up along devil."

"Is this road shorter?"

"Him say, suppose big rain no come, this road plenty short."

"If we left at sun-up, when could we arrive?"

"Him say, morning time nex' day."

"What happens if it rains?"

"Him say, altogether we die."

"How?"

"Plenty devil stop along this road, makem big rain come, breakem up you-me."

"Get ready to start at daylight," said Pia. "Tell him, if he shows the wrong road, and if we don't arrive as soon as he says, he'll be shot."

It was pure bluff, but she trusted to its carrying, with the aid of Sergeant Simoi.

Papuans do not wink; Simoi, however, gave the *sinabada* a look that amounted to winking, as he described, in vivid language, the trouble that would await that murderer, should his guiding be poor.

THE carriers settled down. Simoi rolled up in his blanket—mosquito nets, so high above sea-level, were not wanted—and lay down across the open end of the carriers' fly, within sight of Pia's tent. The old sergeant had acquired the art of sleeping with one eye more or less open, on march. He was dimly aware of movements in the *sinabada's* quarters, of packing that went on, of a silence at last. . . . Light still burning. The *sinabada* was not asleep. Simoi could not settle down until she was; he stirred on his hard couch, half dozing. Suddenly he was broad awake. There was some one outside the *sinabada's* tent.

Simoi reached his arm softly down the barrel of his rifle, as it lay along his leg. He could see the person, standing in shadow; it was not a native. He rather thought it was the white man Simisson. What did he want, there at night? Still watching, the sergeant swung his legs over the end of the stick platform, and raised the rifle to his shoulder. . . . What! it was the other *sinabada*, after all. Who could tell *taubadas* from *sinabadas*, when they both wore trousers? He had been very near firing.

Crouching inside the fly, Sergeant Simoi kept watch. He did not approve of these late visitors, of whatever sex, he was here to protect his charge, and he would do it. What was the other Sinabada going into the tent for? What were they talking about?

Simoi, that man of elemental things, might have understood, had he been near enough to hear; again, he might not. The native mind is still a mystery.

Within the tent, Pia, in soldierly khaki, busy packing up her few belongings for the morrow's start, had been suddenly confronted by a vivid figure wearing silk pyjamas, wild red-gold hair flying in curls about its face. Jinny, sobered; Jinny, in a new strange mood, was there.

"I come to hear," she said, hoarsely, "what you're going to do."

There was no chair. Pia offered her visitor part of the bed, and sat down on the other half. They were very near together now, the face that was fair, sweet, pale as a stephanotis bloom high-climbing above earth; the other, vividly colored as some fire-hearted hibiscus that grows where every hand may pluck, close to the ground. They stared at one another, exploring each other's hearts.

"But that's what I wanted to ask you," said Pia, looking, sadly, at the flawed beauty, the wasting youth, of her who was called "Gin-Sling." "I can't think you knew what you were doing—"

"I knew blasted well. I got him away, and kept him away. It was Spicer made me; you don't know that man—he's silly on top, but underneath, he can buy and sell all the wise men. I always sort of liked him. You wouldn't understand. . . . I married him when he asked me; I think he's another wife or two knocking about somewhere, but I reckoned I'd get what I could out of him. A girl has got to live.

You don't know. You don't know much—the like of you." Once more the light woman's contempt for bread-and-butter innocence flashed out. "What are you going to do?"

"What are you?"

"I don't know as that matters much to any one, but Smithson's cut and run. He wouldn't 'a' left me alone in the bush, not if there'd been nobody there—but when the drink was out of him, he got scared at what he done, and he says, says he, 'I'm off tonight; I'll take the outfit and go, and you can go to blazes or to Mrs. Philip Amory,' says he, 'for you got me into this trouble,' says he, 'and there isn't a miner in Papua will ever take a drink from me again, so I'd better go south and swing a blanky pick at Newcastle,' says he. And he went. He cut into the track a mile down from this, so as he wouldn't have to see you. And I got no carriers and no tent. And if you like to tell me to go to blazes, same as he done, you can do it; you've every right."

"No carriers!" Pia had learned her New Guinea by now; she understood as well as any miner or explorer, what "no carriers" in the far interior meant. It meant death, death certain, and little delayed. If she had been inclined to cast this creature out, if she had hated her, as she well might have done, for the ruin Jinny was bringing on the man they both loved—even so, it would not have been possible to desert her. But Pia had no hate for Jinny; pity, rather, held her.

"Of course you must come with us," she said. "We're trying to get through by a short cut, in time to save the claim. My carriers think it can be done. I'm afraid we'll have to hurry you."

"You're going to— But you can't. The time's up day after tomorrow midday. And Spicer, he's waitin' there with his eyes gogglin' out, ready to put in his pegs, if some one else doesn't beat him. Smithson, he meant to go back with the boys and me, and see the fun; Spicer promised him half as much again as—as—" her voice shook, "as Phil was allowin' him, to work it along with him. And he promised me half of the whole thing. He thought he'd bought me soul and body for that. But I knew the minute I saw you come in that the game was up so far as I was in it. I was shickered, and when I'm shickered I'm half mad, but all the same I knew when I'd sobered down a bit, I'd be off the whole thing. I'm like that. I'm on, and I'm off, and when I'm on there's nobody can put me off, and when I'm off the devil himself can't put me on. I'm through with Spicer and with Smithson and with the whole damn crew, and I wish to God I'd never done it, only it's too late now."

"It's not too late. If we start just at dawn, and keep going hard, we can get there before midday the day after tomorrow. And we're going to do it."

"You're going to stop him?" cried Jinny, springing to her feet. She seemed to fill the little tent with her height, her hair, the blazing silk of her sleeping suit. Pia, sober, dusty-colored dove, looked at this wild bird-of-paradise with a certain touch of apprehension. How to rely on anything so temperamental, so changeable? What side, even at this moment, was she taking?

Jinny left her not long in doubt. "I'd give the heart out of my body," she said, "to see him turned down proper. He's—he's made me hate meself. I've done things that all the pussy cats meow at, but I never done a dirty turn to any one before, and it's owin' to Spicer that I've done it now. If you do know another way we can get back by, for God's sake take it, and I'll know what it is to sleep o'nights again. It was when I heard from Port that he'd married you—Phil, I mean—it was then I went off me nut, and Spicer, he took advantage of it. I'm with you, there's my hand on it." She struck her thin fingers almost painfully into Pia's. "Have you got anything to drink?" she finished with sudden pathos.

"I have one bottle of brandy in the medicine chest," answered Pia.

"I'll make it do," Gin-Sling said briefly. "We'll get there, or we'll die."

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE bottom of the river gorge, it was extraordinarily still. The thin tinkle of the Romilly River among high boulders, parched with drought, seemed only to emphasize the absence of all other sound. Far away among the castellated heights that blackened the stars, rock wallabies may have moved with loping thump, winds stirred in wild grasses, the stately cassowary sounded his loud drum. But here at the bottom of all things, in the great crack that seemed to cleave the very bowels of earth, there was no life, save that made for one night by the carriers, the camp-fires, the moving forms and shouting voices of Pia's expedition. When these died down, when suppers were over, and hacking tomahawks silent; when the natives were sleeping under their flies, and the two white women had come out to sit for a few minutes under cool sky, before they got beneath their close mosquito nets and went to rest—then, the stillness of the deep valley came forth once more in a slow flood; wrapped all things, seemed to climb higher and higher up the bare stone walls, above the low, exhausted river that was breathing feebly in the heart of it, as life, leaving the body of a man, breathes ever more and more faintly through the rising tides of death.

It had been a hard day for both women, forced to drive strength and endurance to the utmost behind the greater and more enduring strength of the men; but—strangely—it had not been as hard as either had anticipated. Pia was almost puzzled to find the whole party so near, by all accounts, to Tatatata. Simoi had assured them that the rocky heights to the left of the cañon in which they were camped, were the last rise before the downfall of the pit. True, those heights were a good thousand feet above the river; but there seemed no reason why the party should not climb them easily enough, get down the slopes of Tatatata in the early hours of day, and reach the field in good time.

They had traveled up the cañon without much trouble, and reached a good camp well before dusk. It was too easy, as roads went in that wilderness; and in consequence, it gave Pia thought. There was no going back; she had wanted that road, and taken it—but why was the carrier so strongly averse to using it, and why would Sergeant Simoi, when questioned, say nothing about the matter? By all showing, this way saved a whole day of travel. And yet, so far, it had been neglected by the makers of the track.

"I wish," said Pia suddenly, "I knew more about this country."

Jinny was sitting on another rock, near by. Her long figure, feet up, hands clasped about bent knees, made a pale hump against the darkness of the rocky walls. There was a faint smell of flowing water and wet stones; the cook-boys had been using some kind of bastard sandalwood for fires, and the air was perfumed with its smoke. A long way off, among the peaks of the Pia Laurier Range, distant thunder broke, grumbled, and was still.

In the silence that followed on the thunder peal, Jinny spoke.

"I know something about it," she said. "I've been once on the field. I reckon it's floods is the matter here."

"Floods?" said Pia, swinging round on her stony perch, to look up and down the enormous gorge.

"You told me the carrier said the place was full of devils, and when it rained the devils came along and broke you up. That means you'd die."

"I supposed it might be very inconvenient," said Pia. "Sergeant Simoi did mention something about it; but—die! I really don't see why one could not get out of the way, if a flood came. One has only to climb up the sides before it has risen too high."

"There's places you couldn't climb."

"Well, then, one could hurry along, and find another place."

"If you'd time."

"Why shouldn't you have time?"

Jinny was silent for a moment. "I've heard stories," she said presently. "Likely they wasn't true. I'm going to bed."

Pia sat a little longer, out there alone in the blackness of the cañon, looking up at the river of stars that ran so far above. A certain obscure instinct of physical repulsion kept her from the joint sleeping place; made her feel, as she had secretly felt last night, that a twelve by fourteen tent was too small for her and for Genevieve Treacher, together. But her innate courtesy made her hide the feeling.

"I'll come presently," she called. "It's so cool out here."

Jinny made no answer; she was flinging her clothes recklessly about in the tent, and Pia could hear her muttering to herself.

"Has she been drinking again?" wondered the girl on the rock. "It's a terrible pity. She could be so fine . . . she might even yet. But if *that* has got her, her time will be too short. How long," she wondered, with a certain fearful curiosity, "would it take a woman like her to reform, change entirely, make up for it all?"

Life had no answer ready to offer Pia Laurier . . . that night.

BY AND BY, when Jinny's mutterings and flingings had given way to silence, the other entered the tent, sat down on the edge of her bed, and began to unwind puttees and unlace boots. She felt that sharp eyes were watching her from behind the mosquito net of the other bed, but she tried to remain, or look, unconscious of the fact.

Without warning Jinny burst out—"I hate you; I think I'm mad."

"She has not been drinking," thought Pia.

"I dono what I'm doing it for," went on Jinny, speaking more and more rapidly. "Why should I? Why should I hand you over to him, and fill the pockets of both of you, when I could knock you over any one of them precipices, or I could set the carriers on to take your head—oh, you don't know; there's nothing any man, black or white, won't do for me—except one—except—" The threatened storm burst; she fell into frantic tears.

Pia acted by instinct now. Her repulsion, somehow, had died.

"Jinny," she said, "stop crying, dear. It hurts you to cry like that, and it hurts me to hear you."

"Why should I stop? Why shouldn't I get them to kill you and your sergeant too? For two pins I would. You took Phil away from me."

"No," said Pia calmly. "I did not. That was done long before either of us met him. Can't we be generous to each other, Jinny, since we both care for him? Can't we want the best for him? I've thought, often, that you might have been the best, if—you and he had met earlier."

"Say it out. I know what you mean."

"If you know, I needn't say. Jinny, I can't give him quite what you might have given. It's a puzzling world; things don't ever fit neatly, as they do in books. There's something about me that's not—not—"

"I know. It's like them mountains that he called after you. Ever so often, on the field, I'd used to look at them, at sun-up; there they was, the Pia Lauriers, high up and cold, with the light on them, and you'd see them for a little while, all gold, and then, when the sun was gettin' warm, and they looked sort of homelike, and not so far away, the mists would come up like cloaks, nuns' white cloaks, hidin' them, and they was gone."

The tears were near Pia's eyes. "Why, you're a poet," she said, lightly, to hide her emotion. "I'm not; I'm not even musical. . . . It's what I said; you have so much that I haven't, and there are things he'll miss. But Jinny, we've got to remember that we love him, and want to do the best for him, and he would just hate it if we couldn't be friends."

"You mean you'll be my friend—real dinkum—no nonsense about doin' me good and improvin' me and gettin' me into 'a nice place where they'd be kind to me?'"

"I want to be your friend just as one girl to another. If I may."

"If you may!" said Jinny, and flung her arms about the other's neck.

Pia's kiss, given without reserve, was still on her lips, when Jinny, without warning, sprang away, leaped to her feet, listened a moment, and then, in franctic hurry, began to put on her clothes.

"What's the matter?" asked Pia.

"Matter? Hark at that!"

"I hear nothing."

"Nothing, hell! That's rain."

A sudden memory leaped into Pia's mind—"

"*'What happens if rain comes?'*"

"*'Him say, altogether we die.'*"

SHE did not quite understand—yet. But she ran out of the tent, and under the few faint drops that were beginning to fall, looked up and down the gorge. There was almost nothing to see; just the bright stream of stars high overhead, the crenellated walls of the gorge enclosing it, and the pale shadows, near at hand, of three or four tent-flies. Camp had been made on a slope of barren sand and gravel at the bottom of a rock wall. There was driftwood there, and plenty of water, and, when they had halted, just before dark, it had been impossible to see any better place behind them or ahead, all the gorge, for miles, was steep too, with a bottom almost level, that made good going, in spite of boulders and moraines of loose stone. The thread of water that here represented the Romilly had not seemed—then—of any importance.

But already that thread was making its import felt; already a small, growing voice was audible among the boulders; tinkle and tripping of water, that came from somewhere far away. The carriers had not heard it—they slept as only savages can sleep. Simoi had heard; already he was up, out of his tent, and running round among the other tent-flies with a stick in one hand and a lantern in the other. "Get up, you —— ——'s", they heard him shout; he wielded his stick with a powerful arm, and many a carrier woke shrieking under his blows. He tumbled them out; he did not waste time on Pia and Jinny, seeing them already up and dressed. Lanterns were hurriedly lit all over camp. The rain was not yet heavy, but it was increasing, in the slow steady fashion that presages a downpour.

"Leavem altogether you load, get down along creek blanky quick," shouted the sergeant. "We go back."

"What is it?" asked Pia, as he came running up to her tent.

"Rain," answered the sergeant. "He fullem up this place quick time. You get down along creek, you two-fellow *sinabada*, you run like hell."

"Where to?" demanded Pia, coolly.

"I show you. You go firs', lightem torch." He was away again, driving the boys like cattle. Some of them wanted to collect their little belongings, their betel-bags, their pipes, their blankets. . . . Simoi cracked them over the head, over the legs, hustled them without mercy. "You want to die here, you blanky black swine?" he shouted. "Get on."

The Tatatata boy had already vanished into the darkness behind the camp. He needed no one to tell him what was coming. Through a raffle of rocks, Pia and Jinny hurried, backward along the way by which they had traveled earlier in the day.

"He knows some place we can get up. It must be pretty near," gasped Jinny, as they pressed forward. Running was impossible, walking not easy. One had to balance and scramble. Pia nodded, saving her breath. In the minds of both was the thought—"It may not be near enough." Simoi, according to his lights had acted wisely; he had pitched camp in the one place where there was driftwood for fires, and standing ground for tents; he had left behind him a way out, in case of necessity. . . . Doubtless the proper place for ascending to the heights above was on ahead, too far to reach in the dark. Doubtless one could have got back to the other way out, in the face of any ordinary rainburst. But—was this ordinary?

In the minds of both women there was a fear that it was nothing of the kind. Where they were, the rain was now heavy, hissing on the stones, thrashing the bent shoulders of the two girls; the thread of water in the river bed was rising, so that they had to walk knee deep in many places. But that was not all; that was by no means all. Behind them, chasing, threatening, thundering, like some colossal "dragon of the prime" in search of prey, came something infinitely worse. They could hear it more distinctly with every minute. It was not like a dragon now; it was like a railway train running away; like three trains; ten trains, roaring through one tunnel all together. And they were like people trapped in a tunnel, who couldn't find the refuges in the walls. In truth, the walls of the Romilly canyon were as much a trap as any tunnel; and Jinny, at least, well knew that, between those walls, you might be beaten and battered to fragments by the thing that was coming, just as you might be battered under the furious wheels of a train.

The darkness and the rain were terrible. The torch was a mockery. "To be drowned in the dark!" thought Pia, sliding over boulders, splashing in and out of pools that deepened with every minute. Then—"Oh, sweetheart, will you ever know?" Then, as she struggled through water nearing her waist, staggered against the clawing current, felt that the end of the fight was very near, came thoughts that she had never told to any; broken and breathless prayers that remain between Pia and her God.

And still, in the roaring darkness, in the rising water, the tiny ray of the torch showed no sign of Sergeant Simoi.

A gust of wind came suddenly, sweeping the canyon; she did not need Jinny's clutching hand, Jinny's half-heard shout, to know that it was the outrider of the flood—the end.

They flung themselves against the merciless rock wall. For the last time, Pia's torch swept up the dark. She saw—they both saw—a rope dangling down the wall. Through the shout of the coming flood, pierced Sergeant Simoi's bull-voice from up above—"Takem rope!"

He had found some all but impossible place of ascent, torn a liana from one of the trees that clung to the slope above the rocky wall, and was flinging it down to the "two-fellow *sinabada*."

The wall sloped outward. The rope, seen in the stream of torchlight, was very long. In a single tense instant, both girls realized that only one could be saved, and each, in the same moment, determined that it should be the other.

But Jinny, Jinny the Gipsy, the dancer, unstable in all things, swift in all things, was in that last moment swift to seize and hold the glorious chance of death. While Pia, more deliberate, cooler, was endeavoring to force the rope into the other's hands; while the wall of water and tumbling rock before which no human thing could live, was sweeping down upon the two, Jinny, crying: "Take him that!" kissed Pia, and flung herself into the flood.

There was but a second left. The rope swung Pia, clear of the roaring Romilly just in time.

Above—Sergeant Simoi and the greater part of the carriers (some had been swept away, but some had followed the Tatatata boy, and climbed safely out), pulled heartily, landing, in a few minutes, one white *sinabada*, who, strange to say, wept and cried at being rescued.

CHAPTER XIV

THE sun was climbing high above the proclaimed goldfield of Tatatata, now changed indeed from the lonely basin that had held all its treasures untouched for so long. Light blazed from the intolerable silver of tinned roofs, clustered low down in the valley—magistrate's house; licensed "hotel," store; small field hospital. Light danced on running water that was led from springs higher up, and flumed into the various claims, dotting the whole extent of the basin—the basin that was gold-bearing almost everywhere, but, nowhere, carried anything to touch the wealth accumulated in one prospecting claim at the very bottom. On new clean tents, on old soiled tents, on "bush" huts made of sago and black palm, the sun struck fiercely, making every place it touched white-hot; for it was growing now toward noon, and in the low latitude of Tatatata midday found no coolness, almost no shadow, anywhere.

Near the bottom of the pit, above the small flat that held the prospecting-claim, were gathered the strangest group that perhaps had ever been seen in that country of strange happenings, Papua. It was far inland, days and days from the sea; but here, on a big flat rock, as on the deck of a ship, stood together a number of men, watching with the utmost attention two who held chronometers and sextants, and were apparently waiting for twelve o'clock to take an observation of the sun.

These were old sailors, of whom every goldfield holds a few. They had held on to their "instruments," as a mate or a master will, so long as he can keep himself and his goods away from the pawnbroker. The field had found them out, and—urged by one Spicer and his mate Caxon, who held the ground nearest to the coveted prospecting claim at the bottom, had got them down here toward noon on the thirtieth day of Smithson's absence from Tatatata. Nothing was to be done illegally. As soon as the thirty days were up, and not one second before, the goldfield at large would compete for the possession of that treasure-hole at the bottom; would place its pegs all over the coveted ground. Spicer and Caxon, it was well known, would run the best chance.

They had been careful to take up much less than their legal share, but to place their ground—being almost first in the field—all round the prospecting claim. On this account, they were sure to be the first who would strike in the pegs, since goldfields custom forbids trespassing. "Give us our bite at it," Caxon had asked the others, "and we'll stand aside to let the rest of you in right after." The miners had agreed; there was nothing to be gained by rushing, for Caxon and Spicer, having no prospector's claim, could take up only two full claims between them, though they might, and would, pick the best bits. What was left—twenty-nine claims—would be well worth getting; worth fighting for, if fighting had to be done. The warden and magistrate had left his house and come down to the flat; he wasn't very sure about that matter; Papuan goldfields had always been conspicuously peaceful, but then, no field had ever shown so much gold in so small a space as Tatatata, and, on a field, the more gold, the more trouble.

For the last two hours, a party of natives had been visible, making their way down the sides of the basin. They seemed—for natives—to be in a tremendous hurry; but no one troubled much about that, since nobody had come to Tatatata to study the habits of Papuans. If any one thought about it at all, he put down the haste to the pig that the men were carrying, wrapped in leaves and slung from a pole—a good pig, by its size, probably one of the tuskers that the Papuan holds "something better than his wife, a little dearer than his child." When there is a feast in prospect, and especially a feast with tusker pig in it, the Papuan, usually slow, can call on reserves of speed that astonish and exhaust the very best of active white men.

"WHAT'S the time?" somewhat impatiently asked Caxon of the nearest old salt.

Looking at a huge silver watch, the sailor replied—"Ten past eleven."

"Aren't you slow?"

"Me slow? My watch slow? That watch hasn't lost, not two seconds, in ten years."

"Then why can't we use it, and hang this sextant business?"

"Because," said a tall, fair man with a prettyish face—Spicer—"we want to be absolutely legal, and if two master mariners make it twelve o'clock, on the day that's the thirtieth after Smithson went away—at twelve o'clock—nobody can say a word about any of our claims afterward."

"It's a blanky long time to wait."

"There's Bob Whitson; he'll shorten it for you, if you lend him a boy."

Whitson, the storekeeper—storekeeper on many a Papuan goldfield of old times; growing no younger, but keen as ever on adding to his gains—sent the boy down to the store; saw him back, laden with beer that was priced like liqueur brandy, and distributed the bottles, making memoranda in his notebook the while. They drank, wiped hands, sleeves, handkerchiefs across their mouths; took out pipes and cigarets, and smoked. They talked, nervously and jerkily, as the minutes, the quarter hours ran by. Some of them watched the team of Papuans, now close at hand.

"There's a fellow has been a policeman," proffered one. "I know the cut of them, in or out of serge, for all that he's got nothing on but a breech-clout."

"I see him," agreed Whitson. "I shouldn't think he had been long out of uniform either. They go back to the pack very quick."

There was another silence.

"What's the time now? Not twelve o'clock yet?"

"Four minutes more," said the oldest of the master mariners. "Those beggars are going to have their feast here. They're putting down their pig."

"My God, men," cried a new, young miner suddenly, "that's no pig; it's a corpse!"

The Papuans had paused, and set down their load. The man whom Whitson recognized as an ex-policeman was unwrapping the leaves. Out of the upper end of the bundle a hand showed long and pale.

What the magistrate-warden said, on the spur of that moment, is better left unreported. No magistrate-warden likes to see corpses, especially corpses that are wrapped in leaves and carried by Papuan head-hunters, littering up his immaculate district; and thus far, Tatatata had really been immaculate, a model to all districts and all fields. The vexed official was plunging downward, with the intention of arresting the whole party and confiscating the corpse, when something happened that checked him as if he had been pulled up by a rope.

The bundle got up, shed the wrappings of leaves, and stood confessed as a living white man; a slight young man in khaki and puttees, with a felt hat crammed down upon his neat dark head. He staggered for a moment as if giddy, and then, steadying himself by holding on to the shoulder of the native who had been recognized as a policeman, he called out— "What's the time?"

"Two minutes to twelve," mechanically answered one of the master mariners, raising his sextant to his eye.

The youth was standing right on the edge of Caxon's claim. Before any one could stop him, he had seized a pick that was lying there, rushed across the claim, and landed in the midst of the precious treasure-hole beyond. With all his strength, which did not seem to be great, he drove the pick into the ground; lifted it, and drove it again, two or three times. Then he raised his head, and still holding the pick, cried out ringingly—"I declare this claim reoccupied, and work done on it, within the legal time, by Philip Amory's legal representative."

"Jumping Jiminy," shouted the old master mariner, "it's a girl, a crimson girl!"

"It's Mrs. Philip Amory," said Pia, "and I'll thank you all to clear off from my husband's claim."

The story has been told, many times, since, on steamer decks, in bars of tropic hotels, through the long evenings of goldfields other than Tatatata. Every one knows how Pia, and the wise old Papuan sergeant, distrusting Spicer, planned to make a secret arrival so that no "accident" should delay the saving of the claim. How they traveled the greater part of the night; how Pia, tired out but determined to go on, decided to be carried for the last stage of the trip, slung to a pole, as sick white people often are; how between them, she and Simoi arranged that she should be tied up in leaves, to look like a pig, while the carriers and Simoi shed all vestiges of civilization, and appeared as wild natives of the bush.

Not for many a year will the story be forgotten of how the "Jeweler's Shop" of Tatatata was saved.

After a storm comes a calm. Quiet weeks followed, during which Pia, with the help, direct and indirect, of about half the miners on the field, worked her claim.

If there was envy, now and then, over the results of her "clean-up," if the man who measured the results of his week's work by ounces, and too few of them, swore he would give it up and go back to Sydney, when he saw that Pia's bi-weekly gathering was counted by pounds troy—it made her popularity no less. The whole of Tatatata field frankly adored her. Two exceptions there had been, Spicer and Caxon. Against them, the public opinion of the field massed itself so strongly that they thought best to sell their claims and go. Caxon was later heard of in Siberian goldfields; Spicer is acting as high-class "barker" for an emigration agency. Occasionally he gives lectures on his wonderful journeyings through the island continent of Papua; the unknown races discovered by him; the goldfield that he gave to an ungrateful and unrewarding Empire.

I TAKE up my tale once more.

There came a day to Koki Gaol and to me, when the world seemed more than ever unbearable. Head Gaoler Holly had been down on me again, for neglecting to have my cell in order by the proper hour, for trying to smuggle letters, for answering back when reproved, and threatening to punch his head, because he pulled down a length of rubble stone wall over which I had spent half a day, and told me to do it again. I was out at elbows with him, with the colored prisoners, with the weather, which was unbearably hot and steamy, and with the world and life in general. There was no special cause, beyond the recurring fits of wild impatience which I had learned to recognize as inevitable by now. News from the goldfield was good; Pia was well, and hoped to come down for a few weeks' holiday soon.

News from elsewhere was unimportant; the whole country seemed taken up by anticipation of the forthcoming visit of the Prince of Ulster, who was to spend one passing day in Port Moresby, before he ended his last long tour of the British Empire, and went home to be married. The announcement of the future wedding had been received with loyal excitement; the town was doubly decorated; any one who had ever seen the prince or the princess was a hero. Pia might have claimed more distinction in that line than any other, had she chosen, for she had danced with him, some few years ago; she had, indeed, been one of his favorite partners. He had asked the authorities if she was to be in town; and had even expressed disappointment when he heard the lovely little Australian could not be present. Whether he knew the reason, whether the strange, terrible, romantic history of our sad marriage had been told to him, no one in Port Moresby could say. It was probable, however; one does not cross the wishes of a prince, without explanation or apology, or both.

With Pia well, with the goldfield claim safe, with the country a-tiptoe over the Prince of Ulster's visit, I had no special cause for sadness, for kicking, as I did kick, in spite of my better self, against the pricks of prison life. Yet I was wretched; I looked forward, four more years ahead—since it was too certain that "good conduct" allowances would never reduce my sentence—and felt, not for the first time, that life was unbearable.

The mood, I knew, would pass. I was ashamed of it; ashamed that I could not pay the price I had set out to pay, without complaint. But I could, and did, save my self-respect by telling myself that it was not always so. That tomorrow I might be more resigned. That next month, next year, I should have almost surely settled into my life at last; taken up the jog-trot, stupid pace all prisoners should learn; set out to cover the long, long road to love and freedom, with at least a fair imitation of patience.

In the evening, just before locking up, Holly came to me, and looked at me, I thought, a bit oddly. I thought he was going to speak, and wondered vaguely what I had been up to now. But he said nothing; he only stared, opened his mouth, closed it again, and went.

Koki Gaol stands on a hill; the public road is below it, not very far away. After I had gone to my cell that night, I was pursued by odd fancies about the road. That was nothing new; it obsessed me at times, as I dare say visible roads obsess prisoners, the wide world over; trouble them; call to them.

This time, however, it was my ears, not my eyes, that were in question. From the wired-in veranda, I could only see dark sky, white stars, the sea below the gaol. But from the other side, the road side, sounds kept coming—or I thought they did. Strange sounds, like cheering. Windy cheering, borne on the night breezes, and swept away again. Cheering that paused at times to center itself into a name, repeat the name, then follow up with "Hip, hip, hip, hooray!"

"THEY are cheering somebody," I decided at last. "What the devil do they want to come and do it down at the gaol gate for? 'Hooray!'—that's what they're saying. Not 'Amory.' It couldn't be— By ——, though, it is!"

For the last cry had been, unmistakably, "Black Sheep! Black Sheep! Hooray!" One might conceivably mistake the not very shoutable name of "Amory," but the sharp syllables of the other admitted no misunderstanding.

I had not gone to bed. I stood pressed to the chicken-wire enclosure, staring, listening, my heart throbbing as it had not throbbed for many a weary month. Something had happened; of that I was now sure. Those men down on the road—friends, for a ducat—were trying to tell me about it.

From the open world a wind of freedom seemed suddenly to blow over me, mounting to my head like wine. What news can there be for a prisoner—what good news—save one thing only?

I battered with my hands and feet on the walls. I shouted till Head Gaoler Holly deserted his supper, and came along in no very friendly mood. I demanded to know what had happened.

He did not reprove me as he might have done the day before. He only told me that I was the most troublesome prisoner had ever set foot in the blanky gaol, and that I'd hear anything there was to hear in the morning; if he got his orders then. He also said I'd better hold my tongue, and give no more lip. But his tone was half-hearted. So then I knew.

When he had gone, I flung myself on my bed, and found myself crying tears of joy.

They told me all about it next day. The Prince of Ulster—God bless him—had asked for prisoners to be released on the double occasion of his visit, and his coming marriage; and had, for Port Moresby, selected me.

There was a day or two to pass before certain formalities were observed. The time went silver-footed. Head Gaoler Holly slacked his severities, became almost at once comradely.

"You're a damn bad prisoner, Amory," he observed, over a friendly cigar—"but it's mostly the worst ones are the best. I wish you good luck; you and the little lady, and I hope you'll hold no grudge against me for doing my duty."

"No," I said. "No," but I was not thinking of him. For the launch was engaged, and the cargo loaded, and I was to be off to Tatatata, and freedom, and love, at dawn.

NEWS travels slowly in Papua; I took my own with me.

I traveled down to Tatatata, from the top of the basin, by night. It was in my mind that I would reach her by dawn; that in the first pure golden hours of day our meeting should take place.

The sun was not yet up, when I came out of the forest on to the flat, and saw, close before me, the house that I knew, from her letters, to be hers. I paused a moment to look back at the high, fair peaks of the Pia Laurier Range, just blushing into rose before the earliest kiss of dawn; and then I opened the door of the little house, and quietly went in.

She was asleep. It was a moment, and no longer, before she woke; but she woke in my arms.

THE END.

Another Genuine Tale of the East

Hot SAKÉ

By L. G. BLOCHMAN

JIM KENYON laid down a sen on the poorly lit table, picked up a piece of wood with an ideograph scrawled on it, dropped his wooden ticket into a basket at the head of the rickety little pier, and climbed into the sampan that acts as ferry between the Tokyo waterfront and Tsukishima Island just off shore. He was returning from his semi-weekly indulgence in English conversation and a bottle of cold beer at the Central Hotel, down by the bay in what used to be the Settlement in the days of extra-territoriality. Kenyon was consulting engineer for the Tsukishima Shipyards, occupied at that moment with applying American construction methods to a rush order from the Japanese Admiralty for destroyers. He was practically the only foreigner on the island. I say practically, for there was Percival Coswell, a draftsman, who lived just down the street from Kenyon's quarters. Coswell wore a monocle and claimed to be British, but his ancestry was obviously not as simple as all that. He was at least one-quarter Japanese, he seemed to have Slavic forebears of some kind, and he spoke German suspiciously well. The rest might be British. Kenyon called him "The Scrambled Egg" and shunned his company. He preferred the naive *bonhomie* of Hayashi, head of the shipyard police, on the nights he did not cross over to the settlement.

AS THE sampan slid silently over the black waters of Tokyo Bay, Kenyon looked absently at the green light hanging from the staff in the bow and brooded. The Scrambled Egg had come to the Central tonight! The hotel was a public place and he had a perfect right to come there. Just the same he was going to poison the atmosphere for Kenyon in the only place within miles where a man could find beer that was cold. Kenyon had been in the midst of a conversation about whether the United States was going to be drawn into the war, how it happened that California voted for Wilson, why the Japanese couldn't make decent matches, and whether the rainy season was going to last late again this fall. Then he looked up and saw the Scrambled Egg, his head bent over a corner table, talking earnestly in an undertone to what looked to be a pair of comic-opera noblemen.

The Scrambled Egg had taken out his monocle and was shaking it under the noses of his companions to emphasise whatever he was saying. Kenyon left the hotel and walked up to the Ginza and back to relieve his feelings over seeing the Eurasian in his favorite hang-out. Then he chided himself for having foolish antipathies and took the ferry.

The sampan was nearing the island when an unlighted *kobune* darted across its bows.

"*Baka!*" shouted the coolie poling the ferry.

The sculler of the smaller craft returned the insult, swirled off to one side, and disappeared in the darkness. In the one instant that it had flashed through the green circle of light under the bow of the ferry, however, Kenyon was surprised to see the Scrambled Egg huddled up in the front of the boat. Decidedly their trails ran parallel tonight.

As Kenyon stepped ashore and walked through the narrow streets of fishermen's houses on the way to his doll-house near the dockyard, he noticed that numerous paper doors glowed a pale yellow to testify that the occupants were still awake. Shops were still open. Old women haggled over wooden-like dried fish. A shaven-headed schoolboy shopkeeper slept over a paper-backed book, leaving rows and rows of colored jars of sweets at the mercy of passing youngsters in calico kimonos. It was not late. The ferry would run for another hour or so. Then why had Coswell chartered his own sampan to come over to the island? Because he did not want to be seen? Probably— But hang it, he was thinking of that fellow Coswell again. Why should he always be thinking of Coswell? Not worth it.

II

HE TURNED into an unpainted gateway, stepped over a miniature garden, sat on the platform of his Japanese house, and began taking off his shoes.

"*Hayashi-san orimas' ka?*"

"*Orimas'.*"

Kenyon remained standing on the ground—to save bothering with his shoes—as the maid arose from her knees and sped silently over the matting to notify her master that the *seiyo-jin* was there.

In a moment Hayashi appeared. He was a little fellow whose hair and teeth lacked definite direction, but whose short, sturdy figure borrowed dignity from his dark gray kimono. He stood on the raised platform of the floor and Kenyon stood on the ground, yet the blond American was half a head taller.

"Can you come out tonight, Hayashi-san?" he asked. "We'll go up to the Kin Getsu for a blow-out. I'm celebrating. Take your stilts; it's raining."

Hayashi was always ready to step out. He was married and had eight children, but that was largely his wife's affair. There was nothing he liked better than laugh and eat chicken and get slightly flushed on hot saké with Kenyon in some obscure restaurant in the fishermen's quarter. He was back in a jiffy, wearing a derby hat and a black silk rain cloak, with a paper umbrella under one arm and a brown cloth package under the other. He sat on the edge of the raised floor as he put his feet into his tall *geta*, the wooden clogs calculated to conquer the mud puddles of Japan. Then they both headed for Aioi Bridge which leads off the east end of the island into the odorous if picturesque Fukagawa quarter.

AFTER threading several black, evil-smelling alleys, they stopped under a luminous globe inscribed with the characters *Kin Getsu* (Golden Moon). While glossy heads bowed to the floor and kimonoed maidens cried "*Irasshai,*" they took off their shoes, stepped into proffered heelless slippers, flop-flopped across a polished floor, up a ladder-like stairway, and squatted about an ankle-high table on the matting floor of an eight-by-eight room. Eating in a restaurant is no public exhibition in Japan.

Kenyon picked up a wooden paddle with the names of *geishas* flowing down its face in graceful script. He handed it to his Japanese companion.

"Order up," he said. "This is my party. I'm feeling so good that I can even sit through their catarrhal singing. Read this."

He tendered a pink telegraph blank to Hayashi who looked at it with his mouth open. He failed to seize its import, apparently.

"She's coming on the *Nagoya Maru,*" explained Kenyon enthusiastically. "She and her mother'll land in Yokohama day after tomorrow. This is where Kenyon sells himself to the old lady."

"So?" Hayashi seemed to be under the

impression that the engineer was expecting a turbine, or perhaps a steam riveter.

"Hayashi-san, you disappoint me," said Kenyon, as a *neisan* pushed open the paper *shoji* and brought in a red lacquer tray laden down with porcelain bowls. "One would think I hadn't been making your honorable eardrums vibrate with the name of the fair Eleanor for the past six months."

"Ah, so-so-so," exclaimed the diminutive police chief, eyeing the tray and curling his legs up under him in anticipation of a pleasant evening. "Of course, the fair Eleanor, your *ki-ni-iri*, of course."

"Hayashi-san, take your chopsticks out of that pot of chicken and mushrooms while I talk to you of a goddess. You are disrespectful. She is coming with her mother, who is delegate to some Hands Across-the-Pacific convention of the Purity League. She is a devil, the old lady, a veritable *oni*, a demon of righteousness, Hayashi-san. If she stays long enough she will purify all of Japan. Then you will have to stay home with your wife at nights, instead of drinking hot saké with such rakes as I. But I will be a lily myself while she is here."

IN ANSWER Hayashi picked up an eggshell bottle, felt its warmth with the palms of his hands, and poured a pale yellow liquid into two porcelain thimbles which the *neisan* had set before them.

"*Kampai!*" toasted Hayashi. "I raise the soul of the rice to your love."

They drank. A bowl of sliced fish came on. Another supply of hot saké. Then a pair of middle-aged *geisha* came in and bowed until nothing could be seen of them but their shiny headdress and gaudy *obi*.

"What ugly *tatsu*," whispered Kenyon. "Next to my Eleanor. . . ."

"For the Kin Getsu," replied Hayashi, "they are beautiful." He interrupted himself to pour more saké, although his complexion was already three shades darker than normal. "You will not find better singers in all Fukagawa ward."

The thin *geisha* with the most gold teeth was twisting the exaggerated ivory pegs of her long-necked, square-headed *samisen*. Then she twanged mournfully at the three strings while her plump colleague with the impending double chin and upper teeth like an awning chanted in a nasal falsetto a song about an evergreen pine tree, the moon, and a friendly breeze.

Hayashi unwrapped his brown cloth parcel and took out two sections of bamboo which he screwed together to make a flute. He wailed an obligato to the song of the evergreen pine tree.

Kenyon applauded.

"You are the best flutist on Tsukishima Island, Hayashi-san," he said.

"I have been told that." Hayashi solemnly wiped his forehead. "Do you know who disputes my title? Coswell-san."

"Not the Scrambled Egg?"

"He has learned to play since he heard that Sato-san, the manager of the dockyard, likes flute music. He goes to Sato-san's house twice a week, bringing great delicious bars of brown *kuri-no-yokan* and jars of golden *midzu-ame*. Then, while the rotund Sato-san, as pot-bellied as the god Daikoku himself, sits with eyes half closed and picks the chestnuts from the *yokan*, Coswell-san plays for him. He plays badly, of course, but his *yokan* is sweet and covers a multitude of sour notes."

THE geisha had stopped to smoke the regulation three puffs on *kiseru* as big as lead pencils. Then they poured out more saké.

"I saw the Scrambled Egg at the Central last night," said Kenyon, "but he didn't have his flute with him."

"*So-des'ka?*" Hayashi was another shade darker. "He was perhaps talking about the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. He always tells Sato-san what a great thing it is. What a great honor that the Tsukishima dockyard is now building destroyers to fight the common enemy for the glory of civilization. Modern warships. He makes Sato-san very proud. Sato-san's maid told me so."

Again the bamboo flute was wailing. It seemed to make Hayashi very thirsty. Then he began playing *ken* with the *geisha*, making the signs with his hands in an earnest manner, as though the honor of all the descendants of Jimmu Tenno were attached to the game. When Hayashi began playing *ken*, making guttural noises as he lost time after time to the giggling *geisha*, Kenyon knew it was time to go.

Hayashi burst into song as two *neisans* and Kenyon helped him wrap up his bamboo flute, and don his derby and rain cloak. He seemed to have some difficulty in making his unwilling, high-cleated *geta* take him steadily forward. But with occasional support from Kenyon he managed to clop-clop through the fine drizzle, between narrow rows of dark doll houses, across Aioi Bridge to Tsukishima Island.

THE two men passed the sleepy shipyard sentinel, dozing in his sentry box. On one side were the skeletons of half-built ships, scaffolding, and cranes, half illuminated by purple arc lights. On the other side were the barrack-like offices, one building behind the other, the unpainted wood burnished by the rain until it sent back faint lavender reflections of the arcs. Suddenly a yellow eye blinked out of the dark bulk of one of the office buildings. Kenyon stopped.

"Look, Hayashi-san," he said excitedly.

But Hayashi was ten paces behind, grunting as he made only partially-successful attempts to pick up something out of the mud.

"*Kilanai des'*," he exclaimed, holding up the muddy package containing his treasured flute. "It fell in a puddle."

"Look, Hayashi-san," Kenyon repeated, helping the police inspector to steady himself. "There is a light in the drafting room. Who could be there at this time of night?"

"Where?" asked Hayashi, staring at the side of the building. The light was gone.

"It was there a minute ago. I saw it."

"Kenyon-san, you are drunk," said Hayashi, making a frantic grab at the arm of his American friend to keep from sitting down in the slush. "Let me take you home."

It was the American who deposited Hayashi at his domicile and then went on to his own house. After lighting a final pipe, he pushed open the sliding wooden shutters which Haru-san, his maid, carefully closed every evening to keep out the night air, burglars, and passing evil spirits, and for opening which Kenyon was scolded regularly every morning as Haru put live coals into his brazier for the first cup of tea. As he slid aside the wooden panels, a damp odor rose from the ground strangely near for a second-story window, a peculiar composite odor that means Tokyo at night: Moist earth, the suggestion of something fried, the diluted tang of the breeze from the bay, and the unmistakable strain of disinfectant to tell that the gatherer of night-soil had made his rounds. Then he noticed cracks of light between the wooden shutters of a house fifty yards down the street.

"The Scrambled Egg is keeping late hours," he said to himself as he knocked the ashes from his pipe into the little garden below. Then he saw two men in European clothes leave the house and walk swiftly down a cross street. "And he has been having company," he added as he turned to go to bed.

III

THE following evening Kenyon was carefully brushing a gray felt hat in preparation for a spotless appearance at Yokohama the next morning. The paper *shoji* slid back, revealing Hayashi.

"We will go out tonight," said the little policeman, bowing slightly. His face, never very expressive, was more set than ever. His little eyes regarded Kenyon with a faraway expression. A hangover, thought the American.

"We will not," replied Kenyon. "We were out last night—if you remember. And I have to get the first train to Yokohama in the morning. The fair Eleanor and her less fair mother are due on the *Nagoya Maru* at daybreak."

"We will go out tonight," repeated Hayashi, looking at Kenyon's feet with a peculiar stare. "We will go to the Kin Getsu. Tonight I am your intimate friend."

"And tomorrow?" laughed Kenyon. "Do you suppose all friendship will have been reformed out of me by the old lady?"

"Tomorrow," said Hayashi gravely, "tomorrow I shall be Hayashi Yoshi, inspector of police for the Tsukishima Dockyards. Tomorrow I shall arrest you."

"You have a hangover, Hayashi-san," said Kenyon. "What have I done to his Imperial Majesty's law and order?"

Hayashi unfolded one leg from under him, stretched it, and contemplated the canvas of the two-twoed *tabi*. Twice he opened his mouth, but he made only unintelligible growling noises. The third time he said:

"I should not tell you. The directors are discussing it tonight. But tonight you are still my intimate friend. You must promise me you will not run away."

"I promise."

"Somebody has stolen the plans for two destroyers."

Kenyon's smile disappeared. He stopped brushing his hat. Then he said indignantly:

"But what have I got to do with it? I haven't the plans. And besides you can't arrest me tomorrow morning, because I'm going down to Yokohama to meet the boat. What would Eleanor's mother say if she arrived in Tokyo and found me in jail?"

Hayashi said nothing.

"But why the plans for two destroyers, Hayashi? All the destroyers laid down in Tsukishima are alike. If I were stealing them I should take only one set. It would have to be some idiot like—like—" Kenyon stopped, his brush poised in the midst of an unfinished gesture. He thought back three days to a table in the Central Hotel, to a face seen in the green glow of the Tokyo ferry lantern; to the flash of light in the drafting room window, and the nocturnal visitors to the house across the street.

"DO YOU know who took your plans, Hayashi-san?" he began again excitedly. "The Scrambled Egg stole 'em, or I'm an aviator. He took 'em for that pair of caviar hounds over in the Central. Why don't you grab Coswell, Hayashi-san?"

"Impossible to arrest Coswell-san." The little police inspector cocked his head to one side and inhaled sharply through his teeth. "He brings *yokan* to Sato-san and speaks of Anglo-Japanese alliance. He is very patriotic gentleman. Besides, how can I arrest him when it is he who told Sato-san you stole the plans?"

"Why the damned skunk." Kenyon was red to the roots of his blond hair. He put his gray hat down on the only European chair in the room.

"He said you were loitering around the drafting rooms last night."

"But you were with me, Hayashi-san."

"I am sorry for you. But I am chief of the dockyard police. Sato-san is badly upset. What a disgrace. The affair must not be told outside the island, if possible. We would get no more contracts from the government. So the directors meet tonight at Sato-san's house. Afterward they will have me arrest you."

"What time do they meet?" Kenyon was thinking fast.

"At nine."

"Go home and get your flute, Hayashi-san. I will go to the Kin Getsu with you in half an hour. We will drink a final cup of hot saké together."

Hayashi bowed, unfolded himself, and stood up.

When he had gone, Kenyon sat down on his gray felt hat.

PLANS — treachery — destroyers — the Eurasian, Coswell—Sato—the Directors—Hayashi—arrest. The kaleidoscope of Kenyon's mind was gradually forming a pattern. Why had Coswell denounced him? To divert suspicion, of course. But why to him? There would be a search and they would find no evidence. But would they? Coswell must have thought of that, too. Then they were to find evidence? Certainly. The two sets of plans would be thus explained. Then there was a plant. For ten minutes he emptied suitcases, threw clothes about, and generally ransacked his rooms without success. Then he called his *neisan.*

"Has anyone been in the house today, O-Haru-san?" he asked.

"No one."

"No one?"

Haru blushed.

"No one *in* the house," she amended.

"Any one call?"

"Only Omori-san." Haru was giggling.

"Who is he?"

"The gardener from Coswell-san's house across the street."

"And he brought you a gift?"

The maid, giggling again, nodded assent.

"A vase on which storks are flying and in which is a sprig of cherry blossoms—in paper, of course, for the blooms of Uyeno Park are long faded."

"Bring me the vase."

She returned a moment later, still giggling.

Kenyon removed the paper flowers and put two fingers into the narrow neck of the tall vase. After fumbling for a moment he caught hold of the edge of a roll of stiff paper. He pulled and then shook out a set of blue prints, tightly rolled, which, resilient, sprung open like a conjurer's spring bouquet. He handed the vase back to the astonished girl.

"Run quickly," he said, "and buy me the largest box of *kuri-no-yokan* you can find on the island. An enormous box—for five yen. Here is the money. And on your way stop and see if Coswell-san is home."

Kenyon contemplated the blue prints on the floor.

"The damned skunk," he repeated to himself. Then he folded the plans carefully so that the ideographs of the dockyard name showed plainly on the top fold.

Five minutes later O-Haru-san was back, carrying in her arms a flat box as big as a tea tray.

"Coswell-san will not be home before midnight," she said. "Here is the *yokan.*"

Kenyon threw off the lid of paper-thin white wood. He removed the first layer of long, purple-brown bars of sweetened bean paste, studded with chestnuts. What a feast Sato would have with that box. He put the blue prints into the box and replaced the *yokan* on top of them.

"O-Haru-san," he said, "I am making a present to Coswell-san. It is to surprise him. Is his house shut up? No? Then you can slip in the front door with this box of *yokan.* On the right, where he sits to take off his shoes, there is a small cabinet in which he keeps his slippers. Do not even say '*gomen nasai*' as you enter. Put the box on the top of the cabinet and come away quietly."

IV

HAYASHI was in great form that night. The struggle between friendship and duty which had been bothering him all day was soon forgotten as the dainty jars of warm saké succeeded each other. He ordered *tori-nabe* and played the flute as the savory chicken sizzled among the leeks and bean-curds on the brazier in the center of the floor. He tried to kiss the homeliest of the *geishas* and broke two strings on her *samisen* with a surprising twang. Then he decided to take the singer home to meet his wife.

"Time we were going," suggested Kenyon. "You have to get up early tomorrow to arrest me."

A steady rain was falling as they headed back toward Aioi Bridge and the island. Even the supposedly modern parts of Tokyo are a sorry mess at the slightest show of humidity, while the dirt streets of such quarters as Fukagawa are deep in slush. Tsukishima island was a vast mud puddle.

"Let us pass by Sato-san's house," said Kenyon as the flushed Hayashi leaned on his arm for support, "so the directors may see you are taking care of me tonight."

Hayashi, as Kenyon had calculated, was at this moment in a state of caring little for directors or anything else. The yellow rice liquor had given a kindly slant to his eyes so that he saw the whole world as a huge joke. He laughed at the sound of his own *geta* on the wooden bridge; he exclaimed "Ho! very funny" when he stepped in a particularly deep puddle; and when he poked Kenyon in the eye with his oiled-paper umbrella, he made loud chortling noises. Kenyon therefore judged him in the proper frame of mind for the experiment he was about to undertake.

They stood in front of the gray-tiled gateway that marked the residence of Senejiro Sato, President of the Board of Directors of the Tsukishima Dockyard Company and manager of the yards. Kenyon pushed open the unpainted wooden gate. Beyond, between two stone lanterns, were two sliding glass panels, half ajar, which protected the little alcove in which one sat to take off one's shoes on entering the house. Behind were the paper *shoji* glowing with diffused light, and showing twenty pair of *geta* laid out in two rows—the wooden clogs of the directors who were meeting on the clean matting inside. Kenyon moistened a forefinger, poked it noiselessly through one of the square paper panels of the *shoji* and peered through the hole. The moghuls were still in solemn discussion. Then he beckoned Hayashi.

"THIS stolen plans business will end in jail tomorrow morning anyhow," he said. "Why not bring it to a head tonight and have a laugh out of it at the same time?"

Hayashi appeared eager but puzzled. Kenyon looked significantly at the rain splashing down just outside. Then he pointed at the *geta.* Hayashi opened his mouth slightly, as though his mental gears had slipped into place.

"We'll have a *geta* chase," said Kenyon. "I'll be the fox and drop a few along the way to give you the scent. Give me five minutes' start and then yell for the hounds."

Hayashi chortled to himself as Kenyon gathered up an armful of wooden clogs and tiptoed out the gate. He gurgled and purred a few minutes more. Then:

"*Dorobo!*" he cried, pushing open the *shoji.* "Thief! He has stolen your *geta.* There he goes."

The directors, elderly men in various stages of obesity and baldness, were incredulous as they got up stiffly from around their social *hibachi*. They could find no adequate language when they saw the *geta* were actually gone. Then, with many surprised grunts and guttural *anonei*'s and *warui*'s, they decided to give chase.

The portly Sato led the indignant pack. He threw his gray silk cloak about his shoulders, seized a paper umbrella with a red square of rubber tied over the end, and recklessly jumped out into the night. When his spotless *tabi* struck the cold mud, he stopped short as though he had changed his mind. But his colleagues were behind him; there was no turning back. He splashed on, followed by nineteen other splashers in silk cloaks, grunting and complaining.

The first *geta* found just outside the gate, gave them the direction. Immediately the pack was in full hunt. Hayashi was a little behind the gang of jabbering, splattering directors. He was laughing too hard to keep up. The spectacle was priceless, of these dignified gray-haired men in silk *haori*, slipping about as though lost in the mud without their wooden *geta*, protesting to each other about the rain, crying out at each sharp rock or cold puddle which they could not see in the darkness. They shouted in triumph every time one pounced upon another wooden clog dropped by Kenyon.

Suddenly Hayashi stopped laughing. The parade was increasing in entertainment value every minute. Some of the directors were rocking along like cripples, for whoever found a *geta* put it on. But the trail was leading past Kenyon's house. Was that his joke? Was he leading them to the respectable domicile of Hayashi, chief of the dockyard police? No, there was another *geta* farther on. Hayashi was relieved, but mystified. Then he saw the rotund Sato dart into the gateway of Coswell's house.

"A fox," thought Hayashi. "He *is* a fox, my friend Kenyon-san."

JUST inside Coswell's sliding doors there were twenty *geta* laid out on the beaten ground. The man who had brought them had been careful to drop one from each pair en route. Sato announced the discovery in a rolling voice, jumping from bass to falsetto in six syllables, like an actor at the Kabuki-za. Then he sat down on the edge of the raised floor to scrape the mud from his feet and reclaim his *geta*.

A large box just at his elbow caught his glance, and the label awakened an epicurean response somewhere in his vast interior. His outraged dignity disappeared, as politeness in a Tokaido railway carriage. His eyes shone, and his lips were parted in expectation. He took the box in his lap and opened it. The sight of the smooth, purple-brown *yokan* brought purring sounds from his throat. With a fat finger he pried out a long bar of the sweet stuff, held it up, and lowered it slowly into his open mouth. His wet clothes and muddy feet no longer existed. His finger went for another bar. Then he noticed something blue shining through the slot left by the first piece.

As he brought his flattened nose closer he could read the ideographs that stood out in white on the blue strip: *Tsukishima Dockyard*.

With a sweep of his hand he threw the *yokan* to the ground.

The directors stopped aghast in the midst of sorting their *geta*. This was sacrilege on the part of the gourmand Sato-san. They were even more astonished when Sato shook out the sticky folds of the missing blue prints. Even Hayashi was surprised.

"Fox," said Hayashi to himself. "How did Kenyon-san know the plans were here?"

Then, the now suspicious directors making muddy tracks all over the clean matting of Coswell's house, tearing down *kakemono* to see if anything were hidden behind, throwing *futon* out of cupboards, finding little locked metal boxes in the ashes of the *hibachi*, and sheaves of foreign papers among clothes in diminutive chests of drawers, Hayashi went out quietly to wait by the gate.

"Coswell might not come in if he hears all the noise," he thought. "I will show that upstart flutist who is the best musician on the island."

V

THE *Nagoya Maru* had hauled down her yellow quarantine flag and was steaming slowly into Yokohama harbor. As she warped alongside the Hatoba, a tall, blond young man in a gray hat was pacing up and down in front of the customs shed, searching the faces that lined the rail of the incoming liner. When the gangplank was lowered, he was the first aboard, rushing past dock coolies, immigration officials, and steamship officers with such determination that they were sure he was a dignitary of some kind and made no effort to stop him.

Just beyond the top of the gangplank a dark-eyed girl with a magazine cover figure and an advertising artist's ideal complexion threw two well modeled arms about his neck, offered him a pair of luscious lips, and buried a head of nut-brown curls on his shoulder. Almost immediately, at the sound of a powerful contralto voice calling down a steward for leaving the baggage in the passageway where people might stumble over it, she broke the clinch and quickly arranged her hair with a few deft pats.

"This is Jim, Mama," she said.

The delegate to the Hands-Across-the-Pacific Convention of the Purity League inspected the blond young man with a quick glance.

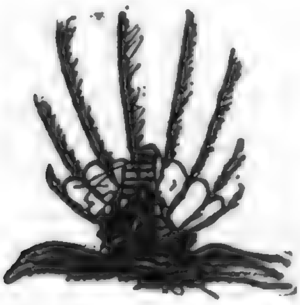
"He looks dissipated," she said coldly. "He has dark circles under his eyes."

"Jim works hard, Mama," apologised the fair Eleanor. "He is building battleships; aren't you, Jim?"

"That's nothing," explained Kenyon. "It's my night work that exhausts me. In my spare time—which is only at night, of course—I have been making a study of the effect of the excessive drinking of hot saké. Then I have been doing some work among the Eurasian criminal class. If the results of my research could be of any use to you, madam—"

The lines about the mouth of the delegate relaxed a trifle.

"He seems an intelligent chap," she remarked to her daughter. "These stupid porters refuse to understand me, although I'm sure I speak perfectly clear English. I wonder if you would mind taking charge of our baggage, Mister—ah, Mister Jim?"



A Howling (Howling is Right) Story of a Long Suffering Cowboy

Toothache

By HURNARD DENT

HUNCHED up on the edge of his bunk in the U-Bar-U bunk house sat "Shorty" Evans. Groans, grunts, snorts, muffled oaths, and other sounds issued from his lips.

Jack Peters, his fellow knight of the chaps and spurs, rolled a cigaret and eyed Shorty critically. It was six thirty in the morning, and Peters was the last of the punchers to leave the bunk house for his daily tasks.

"How's she coming now Shorty?" he asked sympathetically. "Still hurtin' yer?"

Shorty gave vent to a groan that filled the room to overflowing and lifted his face, one cheek of which somewhat resembled a young balloon.

"Hurt," he cried, "Hurt! Say, you cut down, sawn off runt! If this yere pain what's in my tooth was money, I'd have about a million dollars! I'd buy me a—Ouch!"

Shorty jumped at a sudden pang of agony in the aching molar, and fingered round the puffed cheek tenderly.

"Well, here's hopin' she quits hurtin' yer before tonight," said Peters. "You shore mourns plumb mournful. I didn't sleep none last night, Shorty, I shorely didn't, and I'm feelin'—"

" 'Tain't worrying me none how you-all sleeps nights," Shorty snapped savagely. "I ain't slept none at all. I jest ain't batted an eye fer two whole days and nights now, and I'm plumb frazzled, I am—wow!"

"Did you-all try that paregoric what I recommends you?" asked Peters. Shorty gave him a wild look, murder gleaming in his weary looking eyes.

"How in—ouch!— "How'm I going to rub paregoric on them gums when yer ain't got no paregoric?" he demanded wildly.

"Day afore yesterday, when this yere dod-blasted—ouch—tooth begins to hurt, I trys to get me some paregoric, an'—ouch—Mrs. Brown she says the medicine chest is plumb dry of any."

"Hev you-all tried Jake Long's store over at Sage Center," suggested Peters. "Yer know he handles saddles, barbed wire, lin'ment and writin' paper, an' mebby—"

The murder in Shorty's eyes leaped into flame. On the log wall behind the bunk was hung a cartridge belt with holster and six-gun attached. Shorty made a grab for it, but before his fingers could grasp the butt, Peters had dashed out the door into the great open space of Arizona desert beyond. Shorty hunched himself again on the edge of his bunk, his head between his hands again.

“DOD blasted fool,” he muttered. “He'd better leave afore I smokes him up some.”

The last two days, Shorty had done all that a mortal cowpuncher with a man-size toothache could do, to alleviate the pain, short of removing the offending member with hammer and chisel, or committing suicide. Ginger and brown paper, pepper, a hot-water bottle, horse liniment and a red hot needle, had all been tried without result—except the needle—that had brought most surprising results in vocal effort from its victim. When Mrs. Brown, wife of the U-Bar-U owner, had proved to him that the ranch house medicine chest was innocent of any likely remedy for a sore tooth, Shorty had gone post haste to Sage Center, a small town some twenty miles east of the ranch, to seek for relief at the general store there.

“Too bad, Shorty,” the storekeeper had said. “But I ain't got a drop of paregoric on the place. If you can wait a couple of days, I've got a pile of stuff coming on the stage from Cactus, and among it's a pint bottle of paregoric.”

Shorty waited for the weekly stage to reach Sage Center, and in the meantime, suffered a constantly growing pain that promised to drive him crazy. He was as snappish and mean as a cornered coyote. Ride herd? Jake Brown was too wise to take chances with a man in Shorty's condition, to watch his cattle.

“No, siree, Buck,” said he to the ranch foreman, “you relieve that gent from all chores till he gets him his right mind again. I don't crave him mebby stampedin' my cows clean over the line.”

TWO days and two nights of misery had dragged by. The stage was due in Sage Center today, at ten o'clock. At seven, Shorty was in the saddle and on the way to town, his six-gun flopping at his hip, and a Winchester in a scabbard on the saddle. Since the advent of the Carson gang, it was considered wise to go well heeled when traveling on the range. Robberies and lonely murders were only too common.

The sun was scorching hot, even at that early hour, at this season of the year, and riding through its blazing heat over a trail composed of dust and sand that persisted in swirling up from one's horse's hoofs, and into one's nose and eyes, had not sweetened Shorty's temper at all. He arrived at Sage Center with a raging tooth, and a fervent desire to relieve the blood pressure of any of its citizens upon any very slight provocation.

Making a bee line to the general store Shorty dismounted at the hitching rail and leaving his horse with trailing lines, went in. The clock on the wall said a quarter after ten. The stage had come and pulled out again, for he had walked his horse a good part of the way, as any faster gait increased the pain of his aching jaw.

“Hand me that dod blasted paregoric, quick, Jake,” he pleaded. “And I figger ter take the whole bottle too, 'cause I reckon it's goin' to take that pint to get me quit of all that pain what I got in my jaw.”

Jake Long the storekeeper shook his head sympathetically at him, “Can't do it Shorty, stage ain't in yet,” he said.

Shorty looked at him dazedly for a moment, then a faint attempt at a grin stole over the good half of his face. “Don't you-all trifle with me, Jake,” he cried. “It's done gone ten o'clock an' after, an' Sammy most always gits in on time.”

“Well, this is one time he ain't done it,” the other answered soothingly. “You set right down here, an' mebby you won't have so awful long to wait.”

Refusing both the advice and the invitation, Shorty went out to the street. He jerked off his wide brimmed hat to shade his eyes, and gazed malignantly along the street and up the winding gray ribbon of trail, that stretched mile upon mile through the desert, to lose itself at last in the blurred mass of a distant range of hills.

“Hey there, Shorty, wake up!” a voice greeted him from behind while a heavy hand smote his back with a force that made him stagger. Shorty recovered his balance, and turned to find himself confronting the grinning face of Jed Stone, the deputy sheriff for the county.

“What yer mean, battin' me that way, when I got a toothache, yer crazy maveric yer”—then “flop” as Shorty struck out and landed squarely on Stone's jaw. Stone taken unawares, sprawled in the dust of the street. Tenderly rubbing his swelled face, Shorty went back in the store, trying to soothe the throbbing that Stone's misplaced warmth of greeting had set up anew, while a dusty and somewhat crestfallen Jed gathered himself up, and walked across to the Sunup saloon, to salve his injured feelings with a bottle of wet goods.

“NICE way ter treat a friend what jest said hello,” he complained to the bartender. “I never give him no toothache, did I?”

“Guess you ain't never realized none on that complaint, hev yer Jed?” inquired the other grinning.

Meanwhile, back in the store Shorty paced the floor, to and fro, back and forth, like a caged animal, muttering and mumbling as every half minute he glanced at the clock on the wall, then going to the door to gaze off to the south where the overdue stage would first show up.

“Here she comes,” some one yelled, as at last a tiny puff of dust showed up in the far distance.

Gradually the dust cloud increased in volume, and some time later the stage, drawn by four sweating horses, clattered to a stop at the door of the general store, which also did service as a postoffice.

Only one passenger climbed out, and he wore a distinctly scared look. Old Sammy Black, the driver, flung himself off his high seat in front and taking a plentiful bite from a well worn, juicy black plug, announced in a hoarse voice, “Jake, I done been stuck up. Yes sir, stuck up and robbed, right on the highway where she crosses Cow Crick. An' this gent here done lost his wad. Ain't that so, mister?” he appealed to the lone passenger who nodded his assent.

“Hell,” the storekeeper cried, “did yer lose the mail?”

“Mail. We was plumb in luck we didn't lose our clothes too, wasn't we mister?” Sammy snapped. “They done took everything movable. Ain't that so, mister? It was the Carson gang, I knowed that mean buckskin hoss Carson rides, soon as I sot eyes on 'em.”

Oblivious to the excitement around, Shorty was feverishly going over the contents of the interior of the stage. Finding no satisfaction there, he pawed about in the boot and baggage carrier. They yielded him no better results. Shorty thereupon expressed his innermost sentiments to the world by swearing for one whole minute, without once repeating himself, a feat which earned him an approving nod even from old Sammy, who, in his youthful days, had been a mule skinner. “If yer hadn't been solid from yer neck up, you'd hev saved thet bottle of paregoric, anyway,” he wailed.

Sammy glared at Shorty, and turned to the storekeeper for further light. “What's he talking about anyway. Is he bugs?”

“Not worse ner usual, Sammy, but poor old Shorty's got the toothache, an' he's been waitin' a couple of days for some paregoric that was in that bunch of stuff I asked yer to bring from Cactus,” Jake explained.

“Well son,” the driver said to Shorty, “you-all are surely due to wait some yet. When I says Carson cleans us out, I means ever'thing. You mentioning paregoric, minds me as how, when them holdups busted into things, Carson allowed as he'd take thet bottle fer his pers'nal use, an' mebby get a kick out er it.”

SHORTY looked unutterable things at Black, as though he were personally responsible for all the pent up anguish of his aching molar. He started to mumble something, but suddenly changing his mind, he turned, and swung himself on his horse that still stood with head drooped and lines trailing, at the hitching rail.

“I got a idea,” he called out over his shoulder.

“Well, don't yer go an' bust anything now, Shorty,” retorted Long. “I wouldn't pass no opinion on yer brain storm, but yer shore got a face.”

“You go plumb ter hell,” Shorty yelled back, and reining his horse round, with spurs jingling and a swirl of dust, he was away.

Shorty's face, as he rode, resembled for all the world one of those thunder clouds that roll up out of a clear sky on a hot summer's day. The world was a rotten place, and had been for a couple of days now. Paregoric—paregoric—that was the whole burden of his thoughts. He remembered how once he had seen a whole quart bottle of it in a druggist's window. “Yes, sir, a whole quart, enough to make any dod blasted tooth sit up and take notice, enough to—ouch—but what's the good?”

The U-Bar-U medicine chest had failed him in his need. Then Jake Long's general store had held out hopes of relief from the million and one little devils that were pulling strings across the throbbing nerve in his tooth. Now that hope was gone, and just because a band of outlaws must needs choose that particular trip in which to hold up old Sammy.

Shorty had seen a reward notice posted up in Sage Center postoffice offering two thousand dollars for the capture and delivery of the gang, dead or alive.

But what was the good of two thousand dollars to a feller with a toothache? And the even chances were, that Carson on the one hand balanced against paregoric on the other—just one ounce of it—and Shorty would have unhesitatingly taken the paregoric, and let the bandit gang go free. So carrying his ache and his grouch together, he jogged slowly along, with the unholy vision before him of another day of gnawing pain, and a night of sleepless misery.

TEN miles from the ranch, on the edge of the mesa, before beginning the descent to the sagebrush covered desert below, he drew up his horse for a few minutes to ease off the throbbing tooth a while. His thirty years in the open range had trained his sight to keenness and the observing of details.

In the desert air, every little object for miles stood out clearly. A mile and a half away, four men on horses were riding south at a steady clip. One of the horses, he could see, as the sun glinted on it, was a buckskin.

"Well I'll be darned," he ejaculated, "there goes that dirty son-of-a-gun with my paregoric. I'll bet that's the baby what's done robbed me. If he was in range, I'd knock him outer his saddle so darned quick, that—ouch—blast this tooth."

Shorty rubbed his swollen cheek as he glared balefully after them, then swinging his horse, and giving it a sharp touch with his spurs, he started in pursuit across the undulating stretch of desert and sage.

In a very short space, however, the bandits had disappeared behind a butte. Shorty eased up his horse a bit, as he had no guarantee that the gang had not seen him, and though life was pretty rotten at present, he was not anxious to have his career cut short too prematurely, by landing right in their midst, should they be anticipating just such a move on his part.

But against all this was set the fact that, behind that butte, had disappeared what at that moment he craved more than anything else in this world—a bottle of paregoric that might cure his toothache. A whole week would have to pass again before the stage would arrive from Cactus with another of those danged bottles, and like as not, old Sammy would go and get himself held up again, just out of sheer cussedness. Quickly he made up his mind, and a look of grim determination overspread his face. "You can skin me, and hang my hide on a fence if I'm goin' ter go through another night like I did last night," he declared. "I jest got to get me that bottle of pain-killer."

A touch of the spurs, and Shorty was enveloped in a cloud of dust as he took to the chase. He suffered untold torture, as every jolt of his horse caused him to screw his face into all kinds of shapes, but ahead of him, like a rainbow of promise, he beheld a pint bottle of paregoric, so he held to his course grimly.

"Looks like as though they were heading fer the Cimarron Range ter hole up in," Shorty groaned, when they had ridden some few miles on the trail of the horsemen, as easily as following rabbit tracks on the snow in winter.

THE miles slid by as they churned up the sand, Shorty's tooth beating time with unvarying rhythm, to his horse's hoofs, so that he cursed or groaned by turns. He had long since drawn his rifle from the scabbard, and placed it handily across the saddle horn.

He was no fool, he realised he was up against a dangerous proposition in trailing game of the Carson ilk. It was commonly said that Carson killed for the sheer lust of killing, and that his companions ran him a close second. Only a short while back, word had reached them, that while operating near the border, Carson had shot a Mexican sheepherder and three small children, in cold blood, and ridden off with his pretty dark eyed young wife, who was found later with a bullet wound through her temple, as a token that the Señor Carson had no further use for her. Due to this latest crime the reward for the gang was doubled, and the significant addition of the words, "dead or alive" added. Rattlesnakes and Gila monsters were household pets, compared with the Carson gang, when it came to the viewpoint of mercy, or forbearance.

As Shorty had guessed, the bandits had made for a cañon that opened into the Cimarron Range, a bleak, wild desolate jumble of hills and cañons twenty miles south of Sage Center. It was an ideal hiding ground, for the first wind that blew would completely wipe out their tracks.

Spurred on, and primed though he was by an aching tooth, Shorty was careful to remain unseen as long as possible, for he realized that four to one was far too great odds, unless, by some lucky chance he could take them unawares.

"I ain't taking no chances with 'em," Shorty muttered to himself. "They'll shoot ter kill, and I figgers on doin' that same thing. Hereafter, when I thinks of my property what they's hanging on ter, I names centipedes and tarantulas gents."

A glance at the sun overhead told him it was well past noon, as he entered the cañon, so he pulled up and began to proceed more cautiously, for there were numerous places in the cañon, and the little valleys running into it, that would make excellent places to snipe from.

But luck seemed to favor him, for there, stretching ahead, the tracks still showed plain, a hoof mark here, a glint on a rock where an iron shoe had glanced. Half an hour's riding brought him to a point where the cañon narrowed down to a tree-grown gorge through which he could see, as through a tunnel, a broad open grassy valley reaching away into the hills. To the left, where the hills sloped steeply, were clustered a few tumbledown log buildings and the remains of what was once a stock corral.

A LIGHT came into Shorty's eyes, as he recognised the spot, as one, which years before, had been the rendezvous of a bunch of cattle rustlers, who, before they graced a necktie party, had been in the habit of utilizing this particular valley as a hiding place for stolen cattle, until their blotted brands had become a little less freshly conspicuous.

Shorty dismounted, deciding that from now on, it would be safer to proceed on foot. Uncoiling his lariat from the saddle, he led his horse back a piece, and tied him to a sapling. From this point it was useless to attempt to reconnoiter the abandoned ranch, so the only thing for it was to skirt the buildings by a detour up a near-by ravine and over several low rolling hills, down into another smaller coulée, and by dint of much cautious squirming along on his stomach, to come out at last fairly close to the wished for objective.

From where he lay concealed, he noted one building, apparently the old bunkhouse, in better repair than the others, and gathered near, four horses, with lines trailing, and saddles still on. None of the bandits were in sight, so Shorty concluded they were inside, looking over the booty.

A scant hundred yards from where he lay, stood a fallen-in stable, which would make an excellent barrier from flying lead, if he could only make the intervening gap in safety.

Thus far, he had managed to find boulders or clumps of brush for concealment as he progressed, but this last lap of his journey was absolutely void of even so much as a rock or a bunch of sage, nothing but bare sand lay between him and his goal. If the bandits chanced to have one of their number on the lookout, he Shorty would be bound to be seen when he made his dash for the log barrier.

In that event—well— "Got ter sleep tonight, anyway," he muttered grimly. He rose as quietly as possible to his feet, clenched his teeth, and made a quick dash for the logs.

He had nearly reached safety, when a horse whinnied, and almost instantly, a man bobbed his head out of the door of the bunkhouse.

Almost at the same instant the head appeared, a six-gun roared, and lead began to cut the air and ground around him. One of them tore his shirt sleeve, and carried a piece away. Just as he gained the shelter of the logs, and dropped out of sight, three others jumped from the house to join the first. With guns raised, they stood a moment, undecided where to shoot.

SHORTY gently raised himself to his elbows, and cautiously insinuated his rifle through a crack in the logs, and pulled the trigger sending a leaden greeting to the four men assembled before the bunkhouse door. One of them staggered, caught himself, then quietly crumpled up, and sank into a heap. It was the man who had first opened fire on Shorty. But the smoke from his rifle gave him away, and a vicious stream of bullets thudded into his log barrier, sending the splinters flying about his head. He managed to get in one more shot, before flattening himself to the ground again, and had the satisfaction of seeing another of his enemies half stagger, and half fall, into the doorway of the house. His two companions hastily followed him.

"That's two as ain't feeling as fit as they was, anyway," said Shorty to himself.

Just then came the sharper crack of a rifle. He hugged down closer to the ground behind his log rampart. Now the enemy were using rifles, it behooved him to use more caution, for while the six-gun was a matter of luck at that range, the rifle would be vastly more accurate. With the excitement of the last few minutes, Shorty had completely forgotten his sore tooth, but now the pounding of his heart from the exertion of running, kept pace with the twinges of his tooth. He swore as he fired, the jar of his rifle sending a corresponding pang through the twitching nerves.

The bandits' fire became more concentrated, odd bullets finding their way uncomfortably close to Shorty's head through the chink in the logs. During a lull in the firing, he managed to wriggle along to what had once been an old window, some ten feet further down, and carefully raising himself to his knees, pulled the trigger steadily concentrating his fire on the one window opening, visible on that side of the old bunkhouse.

This move on Shorty's part brought an answer in the form of shot following shot in such rapid succession, that it became a continuous roar of rifle fire, pieces of bark and slivers flying everywhere, making his log stronghold look as though it had been hacked by a dozen axes. Several times it was touch and go with Shorty, once a bullet clipped the lobe of his ear, another, striking a glancing blow from his rifle barrel, bumped it against his sore cheek, and fetching a howl of agony from him, cut the shoulder of his shirt sleeve clean as a knife.

"Alright hombres, shoot yer dangdest, an' see what you-all hit," he said, "I'm lyin' low fer a bit. My dang jaw is jumping so now I coudn't hit nothing nohow."

He crawled to a new position shoved fresh shells in his magazine, and placing it handily, crouched down behind his log rampart to watch.

THE firing from the bunkhouse did not abate for some little time, flying lead searching every chink between the logs, on the possibility that he might be there, the vicious thud of the bullets sending a creepy sensation down Shorty's spine every time they landed, making him thank his lucky stars that it was seasoned logs, not lumber, that stood between him and them. Then the firing slowly dropped off, and finally ceased altogether.

Ten minutes passed, then fifteen, but still Shorty made no move.

A face appeared at the bunkhouse window, to be instantly withdrawn, but Shorty did not fire. A whole hour passed. Then he had his reward. First a face peered out the window a moment, and was withdrawn, then, as nothing happened, a man stepped outside, gun ready in hand, and started to approach the fallen heap of logs.

"Guess he figgers that last bombardment got me, alright," Shorty thought. "You-all jest keep a coming, and you'll see who's been got."

He poked the barrel of his rifle through one of the vents, sighted carefully, and pulled the trigger. His target swung half round, then crumpled, and lay, grotesquely sprawled on the hot sand. The next instant, a rifle cracked from the window, and a hot streak of fire seared his cheek, drawing crimson, and a splinter of log slapped him in the mouth. He simply flung himself to the earth, drawing in a quick breath as he realized what a close call he had had.

Then fell a silence, accentuated by the roar of the furious shots that had preceeded it.

If Shorty had been a chess player, he would have appreciated the fact, that at this point the game had reached check! Any attempt on his part to charge across the intervening stretch of sand that lay between him and the bunkhouse, would be fraught with sure death, for the man who had just fired at him from the window, had proved himself both quick and accurate. On the other hand, for the same reason, neither could his enemy charge him. Both were up against the same obstacle. So Shorty decided to lay low, and give the other a chance to make the first move.

His tooth still tormented him horribly, now that he had time to think again. Smoking was out of the question for many reasons, for no good purpose would be served by advertising his exact resting place to his enemies, so drawing out his tobacco bag, he poured some cigaret tobacco in his hand, and stuffed it round the offending member, settling himself as comfortably as he could in anticipation of a long drawn out period of waiting.

THREE hours dragged by their weary course with no sign of life or movement from the vicinity of the bunkhouse. Several times Shorty half dozed off, only to be awakened by painful twinges as the outraged nerves jumped and throbbed with clockwork regularity, at each breath he drew.

The sun was getting ready for its daily plunge behind the hills to the west, and Shorty was beginning to feel desperate. It was alright to lose your sleep when you were night-herding, and the cattle stampeded in a storm or something, a feller could do it when he was feeling alright, but when a feller hadn't slept for two nights, and had an aching tooth to sap his vitality thrown in on the top, that was the limit. Enough's enough.

He was desperately considering the wisdom of storming the enemy's stronghold, when a man quietly opened the house door, and started toward his hiding place. A look of joy flashed across Shorty's face, as he made a half motion to pick up his rifle, but drew back again.

"No, sir, Mister Carson, I reckon I'm goin' ter take yer alive," he said. "I 'low ter beat yer up some, fer that paregoric what yer stole." It was evident that the bandit leader thought that Shorty was dead, for he came on carelessly, though he kept his hand on the six-gun in his holster, ready for a quick draw.

Shorty did not undeceive him, though at this stage it would have been quite easy to have put a bullet into him, and finish the game. He would have been justified, as there was the Mexican family Carson and his gang had wiped out. Not that Shorty had any particular love for Mexicans, for one had once stolen a gorgeous pair of new white Angora chaps, which were Shorty's pride and joy on holiday occasions. The chief reason Shorty wanted him alive, was that he might work off some of his pent up grievance on him in a strictly personal way, and there is no satisfaction in beating up a dead man.

Shorty laid his rifle carefully aside, looked to his six-gun to see that it was all in working order, and worming his way to the old doorway that was apparently the bandits objective, tensed himself for a spring as he crouched. Carson walked boldly to the door, gun extended, then Shorty launched himself in a wild leap that sent the bandit's gun spinning.

If he thought he had picked an easy mark, he was soon undeceived, for snarling and cursing the other was at him like a wild cat, fighting savagely.

Shorty got in a smash to the jaw, but the man was up like a cat repaying him with interest by a vicious jab on the most tender part of Shorty's aching, swollen face.

A howl of concentrated agony rent the skies, and Shorty, crazed by the pain, tore into him like a maniac, grappling with him, and by sheer berserk fury, bearing him crashing to the ground. There they rolled and threshed about like two fighting dogs, until Shorty, gaining a slight advantage, exerted all his strength, and seizing his antagonist's head, lifted it, and brought it down with a sickening smash. Carson went limp, and lay motionless.

"There, you son-of-a-gun, that evens things some, an' it had ought ter teach yer not ter git so fresh with a pore cowpuncher's paregoric next time. It'll take yer quite a spell ter—" he broke off abruptly, and into his eyes crept an expression of wonder and esctasy. A wonderful change had come about, a change for the better.

The pain had gone, nothing but a slight dull ache remained. Also he must have picked up a small pebble while they were groveling together on the ground, at least, whatever was in his mouth felt like it.

He spit it out onto the sand. It was a blackened, decayed tooth.

"Well I'll be darned, knocked it plumb out," he exclaimed. "Yes, sir, darned if he didn't. The son-of-a-gun." He stood staring at the tooth lying at his feet, hardly believing his eyes, while he poked with his tongue at the cavity in his jaw.

SO INTENT was he on his occupation, that he failed to notice the thud of hoofs till they were almost upon him. It was Jed Stone, the deputy sheriff, Jake Brown, and five others, making up a posse.

"Hey Jed, look here," he yelled, as climbing down from their horses, the men approached him. "Look what I got, here's this darned tooth what's been givin' me all the trouble."

The seven men caught sight of the motionless figure of the bandit still lying where Shorty had left him on the sand. "My gosh," the deputy shouted. "It's Carson himself. Yer don't mean ter say yer got him singlehanded?"

"Uh-Huh," Shorty nodded. "He fetched me a lick what knocked my tooth out, an' she don't ache none now. An' that jest reminds me—" Shorty suddenly remembered something, and dashed off in a beeline for the bunkhouse door, before the group had time to recover themselves.

There inside, was a ripped pouch, with letters, papers and parcels strewn over the floor. As Shorty bent over them, a strong odor of paregoric assailed his nose. He kicked the letters and papers impatiently aside, and pawed deeper among the parcels.

Finally he straightened up, holding in his hand the neck of a broken bottle, with the cork still in it, and seal intact. His face held a rueful expression, as he turned to the men who had crowded in after him.

"Say Jed, look at that now, will yer, I done shot up an' spoiled a whole pint bottle of paregoric, an' she's plumb spilt out. Blast the luck anyway."

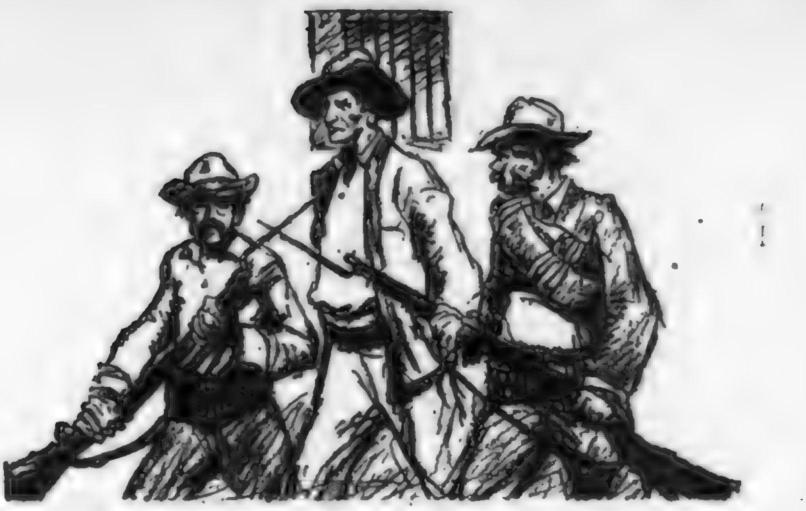
Jed eyed Shorty a minute, then slapping him on the shoulder, cried, "Why yer crazy ol' galoot, there's two thousand dollars on this gent's head comin' to yer, an' you-all howling yer fool head off over spillin' a measly bottle of paregoric—O my gosh."

"Let me tell yer somethin' Jed," said Shorty, flinging the broken neck away. "When I collects that reward, I buys me a whole dozen bottles of that paregoric.

More Humorous Stories

The humorous stories that EVERYBODY'S *is publishing seem to bring more complimentary letters from readers than any other type of story*

Next month we have a ridiculous, extremely amusing tale for you, the roisterous story of a riotous rooster, called "Alexander's Rag Time Jag."



A Turbulent Tale of Latin America

The Devil-GUN

By H. M. SUTHERLAND

WHEN General Carrera kissed his rescuer, "Dynamite Jim" Mahood, in a little *pulperia* in Puerta Flores, he received a solar plexus punch amidships from which he did not recover for several days. To be kissed by a star-eyed *señorita* under the bougainvillea vines was more than acceptable, but the embrace of a *colorado-maduro* revolutionist who waddled in a strut was, in Dynamite's own words, "lappin' the limit by a mile an' a quarter." And when three native policemen sought to avenge the downfall of the general, Dynamite ran amuck, for he possessed an ungovernable temper, and the upshot of it all was that in two days he found himself dictator of all Andador with *El Presidente*, none other than old Vanizona himself, apologizing for being alive. And therein lies a tale.

Several unusual characteristics blended to make Dynamite Jim Mahood a notorious figure throughout tumultuous Latin America. He was a lank Georgian of perhaps thirty years, wiry and untiring, with a studious, aristocratic face, and an exceedingly volatile temperament. In fact, it was the sudden eruption of his ire which gained for him the sobriquet Dynamite, a name which, varied with *Americano Diablo*, followed him through the vicissitudes of a dozen revolutionary outbreaks all the way from the Mexican border to Panama.

Dynamite had two loves and they were as divergent as the two poles. Even in the field, when the campaign had reached its tense moments, his pocket held a volume of poetry—usually Tennyson—and rare was the night when it was not opened by the camp-fire or the flare of his electric torch. His other love was a Browning machine-gun which received more attention than any sweetheart ever enjoyed. He christened that gun "Katy O'Dare" and her staccato voice had named more than one *presidente* or dictator during the last decade.

LATIN American politics appealed to Dynamite—not for possible gain, but because his restless, nomadic nature lived on excitement. To him the secret plots, the *coups d'etat*, the kaleidoscopic performance of life in the tropics, were the meat and bread of existence, and they also served for his play and amusement as well. He played the game for the thrill and the joy of success. They called him a revolutionist, but fact showed that he had fought more often to preserve the government in power than to set up a new régime. Only one office had he ever held, and that one was minister of war in the cabinet of a *presidente* he had made.

Just back from an ill-starred venture in Honduras where his beloved "Katy O'Dare" had of a necessity been abandoned, and where he had received a painful wound in the hip which almost cost him his life, he sought and found shelter with friends in Puerta Flores. On a night when his wound had healed to the point where he could walk without the use of a cane, he fared forth on the streets, unable to stand the confinement of his seclusion any longer. He slipped an automatic into his coat pocket and strolled down the principal *calle*, keeping a wary eye on the pedestrians for any possible agents of Presidente Olivarra of Honduras. Emboldened by the fact that a fiesta was in full swing and that each one seemed intent upon his own enjoyment, he swung into the most brightly lighted *pulperia* on the *plaza*, and, finding a table against the wall, he ordered a glass of *vino blanco*.

At a table half way across the room sat General Carrera, the jovial stomy petrel of Andador, in the midst of riotous revelry. A half dozen *bon-vivants* were seated about him, some of them visibly intoxicated, and the gayest among them was Dona Isobel, a dance-hall favorite in Puerta Flores, a vivid brunette who sparkled like the tropical night and was just as dangerous. In addition to her there were two other *señoritas* of vivacious appearance apparently the friends of Carrera's two aides who composed the party. After watching them for a few minutes Dynamite gradually became conscious of the play of a drama before his eyes, perhaps melodrama or even tragedy.

IN THE opposite corner and half hidden behind some heavy crimson draperies sat the taciturn, saturnine Dr. Zovollo. Just why he was called doctor was a mystery to those who knew him because his knowledge of anatomy was limited to those vital spots where a knife could be slipped most effectively on a dark night. Dynamite was aware of the fact that Zovollo stood high in the ranks of the secret service body Presidente Vanizona had built, and it was generally understood that the estimable doctor rarely ever failed to do the bidding of his master no matter what the mission.

Now the Universal Fruit Company of New York had long exercised a powerful hand in the politics of Andador, and, according to rumor which had reached Dynamite's ears, they were particularly desirous of obtaining certain concessions in the great banana field under development in the interior. Presidente Vanizona demanded a tribute which the Universal people decided was prohibitive. A revolution and a new government would be cheaper.

And so it happened that General Carrera, an impecunious yet popular hero in Puerta Flores, suddenly began to spend *pesos* with a lavish hand. His friends gathered about him in legion and the streets were filled with breeds and blackamoors from farther inland. In all of this Vanizona saw the hand of the Universal people, and his agents were leaving nothing undone in the effort to get something on Carrera so that he could be backed against the whitewashed wall before the firing squad.

This Dynamite had learned during his convalescent period under cover, and more. There were surreptitious whispers of a sudden uprising, the overthrow of Vanizona and the assumption of the reins by Carrera until a new election could be called. But the conspiracy had not appealed to Dynamite chiefly because he had little use for Carrera. There had been a little incident a year or two previously—an impulsive Andalusian youth with whom Dynamite had campaigned, a fickle, black-eyed *peri*, and lastly a firing squad at Carrera's orders. In fact, one or two of Carrera's agents had approached Dynamite in the last week seeking his aid in the business at hand, but the latter had not given them a definite reply.

Dynamite watched the hilarious table with interest, and twice he saw Dona Isobel flash an inquiring glance at Dr. Zovollo who signaled almost imperceptibly with his corn-husk cigaret. With Zovollo sat two companions, bewhiskered and barefooted, who looked as if they would hardly hesitate to do any sort of bidding. At the end of ten minutes when General Carrera was fast becoming boisterous, Zovollo extinguished his cigaret and nodded his head to Dona Isobel.

THE girl leaned down and, catching up a bottle of champagne, placed it before the general. With a laugh Carrera began struggling with the wires over the cork, and in that instant the dona stealthily removed his service revolver from the holster at his hip, ejected the cartridges and replaced the gun. A second later her glass was catching the sparkling, effervescent wine.

The general filled his own glass and drank it with a single gulp. Suddenly Dona Isobel sprang to her feet with a scream.

"You dog!" she shouted at Carrera who half arose, staring stupidly.

Dr. Zovollo darted toward her on the instant and Dynamite immediately caught the meaning of the ruse He came swiftly to his feet and followed just behind Zovollo and his satellites.

"What has happened, señorita?" demanded Zovollo in guttural Spanish.

Her reply was hysterically voluble, the gist of it being that she had been insulted by the dog of a Carrera, and that nothing less than his life would atone for it. For a second Dynamite was fooled by her simulated anger, but remembering that she had long lived on the stage, he edged closer and awaited developments.

Dr. Zovollo raised a light rattan cane and struck General Carrera across the neck. Livid with anger the general leaped to his feet and his hand dropped to his gun holster. At the same instant Zovollo's two followers effectually blocked any possible assistance by Carrera's aides.

Zovollo waited until Carrera had his revolver in view of all and, with a clear case of self-defense, he jerked up an automatic. Then Dynamite pressed the muzzle of his own gun against Zovollo's neck.

"Drop it! *Pronto!*" he ordered, and Zovollo's weapon clattered on the floor, while Carrera's mouth opened in amazement. In the confusion Dona Isobel and the two other women fled.

"It's a frame-up, Carrera," explained Dynamite, "a little coup to put you out of the going. The girl spiked your gun."

"*Gringo* meddler!" snarled Zovollo and, turning on his heel, strode from the room.

"*Nombre de Dios!*" gasped General Carrera. "*De veras!* It is you, my American compatriot in the great cause," he whispered. Then he continued in a tone that all the curious spectators could hear. "You have saved my life, señor, and it is now yours to serve you throughout the years. Later we will attend to Zovollo and that painted devil. *Esta bueno!* A bottle of champagne, *muchacho!*" he shouted.

But Dynamite, not wishing to be seen in such a friendly attitude toward a known revolutionist, politely refused and started toward his table for his hat and stick. Carrera stepped smilingly in front of him.

"Then I must salute my br-rave friend," he declared, and with Latin impetuosity he embraced his rescuer and kissed him resoundingly on the cheek.

DYNAMITE broke the clinch with a short uppercut which traveled not more than ten inches, but landed with the force of a piston-rod on the point of the general's jaw. A straight, hard right to the solar plexus literally lifted him from the floor and crumpled him neatly under the table where he remained. Then calmly the *Americano* returned to his table, finished his glass of white wine and then made ready to leave.

Under the administering efforts of his two aides Carrera began to show signs of returning consciousness, and at last he sat up, blinking stupidly. At that moment three native policemen made a hurried entrance and stared about the room seeking the cause of the disturbance. Just behind them appeared Zovollo and at a word from him they moved warily toward the *Americano Diablo*. The touch of one of the trio's hands, a half-breed he was, pulled the trigger of Dynamite's anger and he went berserk. In ten seconds two of the policemen had followed the general's illustrious example under the tables while the third almost bowled over Zovollo as he fled through the door.

At the door Dynamite suddenly came to a halt. Evidently a riot call had been sent in, for fully a dozen soldiers from the *cuartel* came running up the steps, balancing their rifles awkwardly as if they were lances. Dynamite gave vent to a chuckle of pure enjoyment and met them at the top of the steps. Catching the leader by his red-striped tunic, he drove his fist into the already flat nose, and the rifle fell unheeded to the floor. Hurling the dazed victim bodily among his companions he downed four or five, and before they had time to recover from their surprise, he was among them, kicking, butting, and occasionally getting in a powerful swing on a vulnerable spot which invariably sent a fistless opponent into dreamland. Twice he felt the biting sting of a bayonet, but, realizing that they were only flesh wounds, he retaliated with redoubled fury.

Zovollo stood just out of reach encouraging the attackers to further efforts, and Dynamite made a strong effort to get at him, but the path was blocked. With victory in sight Dynamite leaped upon the bewildered survivors, and out of the tail of his eye he saw Zovollo snatch up a fallen rifle and spring to the attack, but before he could disengage himself, the butt of that gun crashed into the back of his head. A blinding flare of light—a buckling of his knees against which he weakly struggled were Dynamite's last coherent memories.

HOURS later a throbbing, almost unbearable pain brought him back to consciousness, and for several minutes he lay staring upward, seeking to gather the shreds of his memory. Recalling the fight he tried to piece out what must have occurred since that time. Instinctively he realized that he had been jugged—probably in the *cuartel*—but why the unearthly silences?

Glancing at his watch by the flare of a match he saw that it was past nine o'clock, and should be broad daylight, yet it was as black as a Georgia watermelon feast.

"Must have treated 'em kinda rough last night," he grunted, "or they wouldn't have sealed me up so tight."

With another match he found a half-burned candle thrust into the neck of a bottle probably left by some poor devil of a prisoner who had marched from it to the white-washed wall in the courtyard of the *cuartel*, for he realized that the cell was one of a dozen deep under the barracks used for dangerous political prisoners. Knowing that fifty American dollars would purchase freedom from any charge this side of murder, Dynamite decided to make the best of conditions until he could get a message through to his friends.

An earthenware jar of water stood just inside the barred door and with it Dynamite laved his head until the pain abated considerably. Then bandaging the bruise with his dampened handkerchief, he settled down on the bunk beside the candle and was soon deeply immersed in the inevitable volume of Tennyson.

It might have been an hour later when he was interrupted by the grate of a key in the lock and two soldiers stepped into the cell. Dynamite arose and stared at them inquiringly.

"The señor will accompany us," ordered one of them in Spanish.

Thrusting his book into his pocket, Dynamite obeyed, walking silently between the two guards and wondering what was the cause of such serious formality. Up the winding stone steps to the main floor of the *cuartel* they climbed and entered the office of the *comandante*.

Dynamite stopped just inside the door and glanced over the room curiously. There were approximately a dozen men present including Dr. Zovollo and the *comandante* of the *cuartel*, Sabas De Vega, whom Dynamite had known for some time. The others were young officers in Vanizona's guards, all of whom turned interested eyes on the prisoner.

"A court-martial, is it?" he chuckled, taking a seat which one of the officers pointed out. "What's the charge?"

"There is certainly no cause for levity," declared Dr. Zovollo in excellent English. "You are charged with the murder of Ramon Angel Losega, a soldier in the service of his Excellency, the President of Andador—also with inciting riot, and with malicious assault upon the police force of Puerta Flores."

"Couldn't you cook up another charge or two, Zovollo? Surely I was guilty of more than that—or I would have been if I had got in reach of you. When did this murder take place? I don't seem to remember anything like that."

"You'll remember it soon enough."

The court-martial was quickly under way, and in the beginning Dynamite sought to obtain justice, but after ten minutes he gave up the attempt with a short, hard laugh. The trial was a farce, a travesty on justice, and the formalities were speedily consummated. The charge was that Señor Mahood had slain Ramon Angel Losega during a fight before the *Almirante pulperia*, the weapon being a bayonet the prisoner had snatched up during the battle.

AT FIRST Dynamite considered the charge false even to the death of the soldier, but apparently the man had been killed, probably by an accidental thrust by one of his companions during the mêlée. It was an easy matter to shift the responsibility to the *Americano*, and Zovollo apparently had his heart set upon the elimination of the man who frustrated his attempt on the life of Carrera.

The sentence was the firing squad, the hour to be set by Comandante De Vega. With a bitter laugh Dynamite heard the pronouncement, and then he came to his feet and strode a pace or two closer to Zovollo and De Vega.

"Listen to me a minute!" he said in level tones. "You dirty vermin think you can get away with this frame-up. You think you can railroad me into oblivion, and get off without a scratch. You've got another guess comin'—"

"Bah!" spat Zovollo. "You threaten with your great country. They have had enough trouble over your actions and they will not care greatly what happens to you—if they ever hear of it," he added meaningly. Some of the officers smiled knowingly.

"You lily-livered curs!" Dynamite leveled his finger at De Vega. "But I flatter you. It would take Divine Dispensation to raise you to the level of a yellow dog. If there was a single spark of manhood in any of you, you'd give me a gun and we would settle this affair now. There's—let's see—eleven of you to one Give me one gun. I dare you, you filthy carrion. You get a chance to put in eleven bullets to my one and you won't take the chance. That's—"

"Take the dog back to his cell!" ordered De Vega, livid with rage.

The soldiers obeyed, hustling the prisoner down the steps and never slacking their speed until they had clanged the steel door upon him.

But Dynamite had gained his point. He had deliberately set about to insult De Vega and Zovollo that they would delay his execution in order to put him to slow torture. This would give him one day of grace anyway, and much can be done in one day.

Back in his cell Dynamite relighted his candle and made a swift examination of the walls. They were of solid masonry, impossible to break through, and the steel bars of the doors were thick and sturdy, interlaced in such a manner that it would take a Houdini to slip by. Then high in one corner he found what he sought, a small barred ventilating window, sufficiently large to admit his body without compelling him to go through head first. The window either opened into the next cell or the corridor, and drawing his bunk to the wall noiselessly, he peered through. His sigh of relief was audible. The window opened upon the corridor leading toward the steps up to the first floor of the *cuartel*.

Extinguishing his light so that he might hoard it for future use, he sat down on the bunk, and by the dim half-light from the corridor he began his preparations for a desperate break. Listening intently for a quarter of an hour he was convinced that the *comandante* considered the cell impregnable, and that the guards were on the floor above. Then drawing his book of poetry from his pocket, he slit the leather binding and removed a small coil of steel saw and two or three sections of metal which he quickly fitted into an instrument which was sturdy and effective.

Long experience with Latin American politics had taught him many things, among them to be prepared for just such an emergency as the predicament in which he found himself. From a beach-comber at Punta Soledad he had purchased the saw for the price of a drink of rum, and once a couple of years before it had been instrumental in his sensational escape from the prison barracks in Guatemala. Carefully and without making the slightest sound, he worked through several hours during the day, and by nightfall he had severed three of the bars, leaving them hanging by a thread so that they would not be discovered.

A supper of *tortillas* and water was served late in the afternoon and he made a hearty meal, for he was hungry, and he realized that there was yet some hard work before him. His fears of molestation were allayed when an hour had passed after the time for the evening meal, and, when he was assured that it was safe to go ahead, he attacked the last two bars An hour before midnight the job was finished, and taking one of the severed bars in his hand for use in an emergency, he carefully dropped through the window to the corridor.

STOPPING every ten feet to listen, he made his way cautiously toward the steps, and on reaching the foot of the balustrade he heard footsteps in the hallway above. Noiselessly he glided into what appeared to be a storeroom on his left and crouched behind the door. The footsteps died away without approaching the top of the stairs, and Dynamite arose from his cramped position, stumbling against a pile of long, conical objects.

With a guarded ejaculation of surprise he stooped to investigate and then moved over to the wall where stood a heavy piece of artillery, a gun equivalent to the ordinary six-inch field piece, but of a strange and unwieldy appearance. A second glance brought recognition, and with it an understanding of the mystery of the conical shells on the floor.

While an artillery officer in the U. S. Army during the late World War, he had been stationed at the proving grounds out of Washington for several months, and during the Autumn of '17, they had tested a gun designed to annihilate armies with a deadly gas. It was a weird, two-barreled weapon, one tube directly over the other, and patterned after the famous Spanish-American War dynamite gun. A charge of powder was fired in the lower tube and the confined nitrogen, escaping through the upper tube, expelled a long shell filled with chlorine gas.

The shell was very thin, and contained a vast amount of gas. Because of this, it was dangerous to fire it in the tube with the powder for fear of a premature loosing of the gas, hence the double barrel. The tests at Aberdeen, Maryland, had shown the gun to be highly inaccurate, sometimes firing the shell at the distance of five thousand yards and sometimes at two hundred yards. Because of this inconstancy the government discarded it, but the enterprising manufacturers had evidently disposed of their reserve stock to Central and probably South American countries.

Somewhere Dynamite had heard whispers of a mystery gun owned by old Vanizona, whispers which had attributed marvelous powers to it, and which the *presidente* kept as a threat against all possible uprisings. But, after a hurried examination, Dynamite gave his entire attention to the business in hand. He was not yet outside the walls of the *cuartel*, and the chances were against any peaceful attainment of that highly desirous ambition.

Up the stone stairs he crept softly and at the top halted momentarily to get his bearings. The corridor to the street turned at right angles about ten feet away, and the door to the *comandante's* office was just beyond the corner. As he neared the turn he caught the echo of stertorous breathing somewhere, but whether by a sleeping guard or a drunken prisoner in the row of cells farther down the corridor he was unable to ascertain. Doubly cautious he peered around the corner and saw a guard sitting in a chair near the open door to the office of the *comandante* dozing with his rifle across his knees.

FOR a full minute Dynamite stood in his tracks training every sense to the detection of any sound which would tell him whether or not any one was in the office. Suddenly a chair scraped over the floor in the office and then footsteps came toward the door. Dynamite drew back behind the wall and waited, gripping his steel bar in his right hand ready to use it if the officer came down the corridor.

"Por Dios!" It was De Vega's irate voice berating the sleeping guard. *"Tonto!"* Then followed a flow of swift Spanish invective promising everything from a public whipping to death if the guard was ever caught asleep at his post again.

Then De Vega left, slamming the street door behind him, and Dynamite ventured a glance down the corridor. The guard was staring in the direction his *comandante* had disappeared and rubbing his knee ruefully. De Vega had apparently kicked him.

Muttering to himself the guard turned and picked up a lantern preparatory to making the rounds of the *cuartel*. As he drew near the corner behind which Dynamite was lurking the latter removed his handkerchief from about the wound on his head and wrapped it over his closed fist to protect his knuckles. Then he crouched ready for a sudden leap and waited.

When the unsuspecting soldier rounded the corner Dynamite was upon him before he had time to utter a warning cry. A perfectly timed blow with his bandaged fist caught the guard flush on the point of the jaw and he went down without a sound. It was as clean a knockout as Dynamite could have hoped for, and the American grunted with satisfaction as he knelt over his unconscious victim and twisted the handkerchief into a gag. Snatching the keys from the limp hand of the unconscious man, Dynamite made swiftly for the secret door, and, finding it unlocked, fled precipitately into the night.

Near the *Almirante*, the scene of his set-to with the soldiers, he swung across the *plaza* and knocked at the door of an imposing two-story house which General Carrera had recently taken and which was the secret rendezvous of his co-revolutionists. After ten minutes of guarded effort Dynamite had almost come to the conclusion that the general had moved, but at last the portal opened and a youthful *mozo* peered fearfully out.

"I would see General Carrera. Conduct me to him!" ordered Dynamite in Spanish, and the youth, probably too badly frightened to take the usual precautions, led him to the door of a bedchamber on the ground floor. Without the formality of knocking, Dynamite entered.

The general, who kept notoriously late hours, was just retiring, but had not extinguished the light. He sat in the bed in a suit of flaming purple pajamas and sought to pull the silken coverlet over him as a protection against the unexpected apparition. His eyes were wildly seeking some sort of a defense weapon, and anxiety, if not fear, was written large on his face. Dynamite laughed at the ludicrous picture, and held up his hands palms outward.

"Peace at any price, General! I come to have a little heart-to-heart talk with you about a number of things, and you may as well dress while I'm gettin' through the preliminaries, for I believe that we have a full night before us."

"*Madre de Dios!* You come like a ghost in the night—to talk business?" Carrera sat with his legs dangling over the edge of the bed. "Is it to save my life again?"

"I apologize for my—my lack of appreciation for your feelings the other night, General," said Dynamite with a grin. "I reckon I had taken an *aguardiente* or so too much."

CARRERA rubbed his jaw tentatively. Then he smiled. "We call it—what you say?—square, eh?" He thrust out his hand and Dynamite gripped it.

"Right, General! Now we'll get down to the business of the meeting while you get on your pants. In the first place Zovollo—"

"Pig—dog!" interrupted Carrera, struggling with his shirt.

"I agree with you absolutely. Anyway Zovollo seemed to resent the fact that I was able to nip in the bud the little plot of his and Vanizona's to put you on the blink with the aid of Dona Isobel. As a result of that and a bit of a mix-up with the standing army, they locked me up in the *calaboza*. Yesterday they sentenced me to be shot and—"

"*Caramba!*" Carrera ceased struggling with his belt. "Sentenced to be shot?"

"That was the program, but I busted the coop and got away. They don't know it yet, but they'll discover it soon. Now, there's something back of this except just the fact that I got in a row with the police. They are damned anxious to get rid of me, and you also. And I think I know the answer to the riddle."

"Yes?" Carrera forgot about his clothing and was hanging on to each word his visitor said.

"I believe they think I'm with you in this revolutionary plot you are cookin' up now and—"

"*Mira—!*"

"Don't interrupt. I want to get at the bottom of things. It is true that the Universal people are backing you in this revolution, isn't it?"

"I have not said so."

"You wouldn't be shouting it from the housetops," agreed Dynamite. "If you were to gain control here, could you get enough coin to insure the election? That's what I want to know."

"There are certain—"

"Banana concessions," finished Dynamite with a grin. "Good! That's all I wanted to know and apparently old Vanizona already knows as much. And he thinks I'm in cahoots with you. That's why he's so anxious to get rid of us. Now it looks to me like we'd better join forces for a while and see if we can't set Vanizona where he belongs and help develop the great fruit industry of Andador. Also I have a little private score to settle with Zovollo and De Vegas."

"*Bueno!*" Carrera sprang to his feet, his face beaming, and advanced several steps toward Dynamite. Then he halted in his tracks and chuckled. "Almost I kissed you again," he said lugubriously.

"We'll save the victory celebration until tomorrow," declared Dynamite smothering a grin. "Listen, Carrera! Did you ever hear anything about a gun—a mysterious cannon which old Vanizona kept in—"

"The devil-gun!" Carrera spread his hands depreciatingly. "That, señor, is the fly in the ointment. It is the fear of that gun which makes it so hard for me to gather recruits in the great cause. They attribute to it miraculous powers—that one shot—pouf! The entire city is destroyed. It is—what you call it—the Sword of Damocles."

"Bosh! It is nothin' but an obsolete gun designed to fire gas shells. But I've heard that Vanizona has advertised it pretty well and that he had a lot of faith in it himself. Now, suppose that we captured this devil-gun, as you call it, and mounted it on La Cieba Heights above town tonight. What would be the result?"

"*Por Dios!* Puerta Flore would be ours and Vanizona would be on his knees begging for his life."

"Then get me fifty men as quick as you can."

"But señor—"

"*El Presidente Carrera!* How would that sound? Hurry up. *Pronto!*"

"Emilio!" called the general obediently and an instant later the *mozo* thrust his head through the door. "Awaken Filipe and Don Martinez and have them come to me quick."

The boy obeyed silently, and Carrera turned to Dynamite.

"You have seen this gun?"

"It is mounted in a storeroom in the *cuartel*, and there's a hundred shells or more ready for the taking. Only a few guards are in the barracks at the *cuartel*, not more than thirty, and they are asleep. Ten men can keep them at bay while we get the gun."

"But where are the other soldiers?"

"Most of them are at the *Casa Grande* guarding Vanizona, and the others are down the coast watching for those French gun runners. It's easy, Carrera. You'll never have another chance like it."

From a cabinet beside the bed Carrera brought forth a bottle of Burgundy and two glasses which he filled.

"To success, the most elusive of all jades!" he toasted and crashed his glass against the wall. "If we fail," he said frankly, "we won't need the glasses again, and if we win, we will drink from the golden service in the palace."

AN HOUR later half a hundred men were moving silently through the darkened streets in the direction of the *cuartel*. At the head of the column marched Dynamite and General Carrera, the latter puffing slightly in his efforts to keep pace with the eager *Americano*. According to prearranged plans they made no sound until they had reached the *cuartel* entrance, and then with a sudden rush they crashed the doors and speedily overpowered the half dozen sleepy soldiers on duty.

Carrera with a score of picked men took over the barracks and their surprised occupants without encountering any real resistance while Dynamite with the remainder of the force turned their attention to the gun and the shells. Under the direction of the *Americano* they removed the ammunition while he considered plans for moving the heavy gun. All of this was accomplished with all possible dispatch and silence, and the sleeping city knew nothing of the coup until it awoke the next morning. But fearful of discovery by the regiment stationed at the new barracks close to the palace, the revolutionaries lost no time in taking up a position on La Cieba Heights just outside the city limits—a position which, as Dynamite had pointed out, would give them complete dominance.

Before breakfast and when most of the citizenry were still abed, there flashed a report through Puerta Flores that General Carrera was entrenched on La Cieba Heights and that the fighting would open at any moment. Curious throngs gathered in the streets and stared upward, while unaccustomed activity was in evidence at the Palace Barracks. The soldiery were preparing for action, and Dynamite, with the aid of a pair of binoculars, was able to distinguish the bulky, bearded Vanizona holding a conference with De Vega and several other officers at one side of the parade ground.

"Looks like they're plannin' to rush us," declared Dynamite handing the glasses to General Carrera. "We'll let 'em come and then turn our ace-in-the-hole at the psychological moment."

"It is a gr-reat—how you say?—bluff, is it not?" queried Carrera softly.

"And in this little game called Life, Carrera," returned Dynamite, "the man who puts up the highest stakes usually wins. Screw your nerve to the stickin' place—we'll eat dinner in the palace."

Old Vanizona, ruthless, impatient, and unable to brook any opposition whatever, lost no time in bringing the issue to a climax. With colors displayed, and bands playing he marched his columns through the streets and massed them at the foot of the heights. Under him were approximately two thousand men while the forces on the heights, including the reinforcements which had come in since daylight, did not exceed above a hundred men.

That Vanizona anticipated little difficulty in squelching the uprising was evidenced by the carelessness with which he planned his attack. He spread his men out in haphazard fashion and then sent a courier with a white flag to demand surrender.

"Apparently he has forgotten his devil-gun," said Dynamite, watching the proceedings with interest.

"Not so, señor," returned Carrera emphatically. "But he has no one who will handle it for him. His own men are sorely afraid of it, and he has made several efforts to get a man from your country to give instructions in its use, but thus far he has been unsuccessful. The surprise will be complete."

WITH his innate love of the theatrical Dynamite had reserved the devil-gun for the grand finale, intending to wait until Vanizona was on the point of rushing the slopes. So, when the courier arrived with his demand for an unconditional surrender, Dynamite decided to have a talk with Vanizona in order that there should be no miscarriage of the surprise party. After a short consultation with General Carrera he mounted a horse and rode down the hill with the courier.

Vanizona met them in an open field a few yards in advance of his troops. He was scowling and in an unmistakably bad temper.

"Your answer, señor?" he demanded shortly. "Does *Carrera* surrender?"

"General Carrera demands *your* unconditional surrender and has agreed to give you twenty-four hours in which to settle your affairs and take your departure—"

"This is not the time for jesting," cut in Vanizona with asperity.

"If your Excellency will take the trouble to watch that rocky eminence on the left above General Carrera's position, he will quickly see that the laugh is on the other side of the mouth." Dynamite's Spanish was studiously ceremonious.

Stepping out a few paces into the field, Dynamite removed a white silk handkerchief from his pocket and waved it over his head. An instant later there appeared at the crest what seemed to be a field piece, its muzzle frowning threateningly at the city. But even at this distance the two tubes—one above the other—were plainly visible.

"Does *El Presidente* believe that I am jesting now?" asked Dynamite grimly. "It is, as you can easily see, the devil-gun."

At the first appearance of the piece Vanizona straightened in his saddle and stared at it unbelievingly. Gone was the domineering, arrogant expression and in its stead came a look of haunting fear and irresolution.

"It cannot be," he half whispered, passing a shaking hand across his eyes as if trying to drive away the picture. "I do not understand." Then he wheeled toward Dynamite, his face working with rage and anger. "Who betrayed me? How did you get possession of this gun?"

"What other reason would we have had for raiding the *cuartel* last night?"

"To rescue you, fool. That is what De Vega says."

"The guard will tell you that I escaped an hour before the attack was made," replied Dynamite with a grin. "But that is neither here nor there. Do you accept General Carrera's terms?"

Vanizona glanced toward his men and saw that the jig was up. Many of the soldiers were already in full retreat back toward the city, while the remainder were being held in position only by the persevering efforts of the officers. The propaganda about that gun which Vanizona had spread was reaping its harvest and no power on earth could hold the regiment long. Even as the *presidente* gazed at them, they broke in utter disorder and scurried for safety into the city and beyond.

Vanizona, shouting maledictions and threats, spurred after them in an effort to check their flight and make some semblance of a stand against Carrera's nondescripts. Dynamite stood watching them until the last man had disappeared, and then he slowly climbed the heights. Half way up the slope he was met by Carrera and two or three of his aides. The general was joyously enthusiastic and Dynamite made ready to dodge any possible kissing ceremonies.

"Victory!" he shouted. "We are crowned with glory!"

"Keep your shirt on, Carrera," cut in

Dynamite shortly. "We are still outside the city. Send a messenger to Vanizona tellin' him that if the white flag of surrender is not raised over the palace by eleven o'clock, you will fire into the city. Send two copies and have one posted in the *plaza*. If the people see it they will force him to resign."

AT A quarter to eleven a shout went up from Carrera's followers as they caught the flash of white over the green trees of the palace grounds. And without any delay they made ready for their triumphant entry into Puerta Flores. The devil-gun, covered with a tarpaulin, was carefully lowered down the tortuous road, and it was given a place of honor in the line not far behind Carrera and Dynamite.

On the streets the fickle populace acclaimed the new heroes with shouting and much flag waving. Mantillas fluttered from second story windows, and Carrera glowed and bowed and kissed his fingers airily to the balconies. He was in his glory and the sweetness of the moment intoxicated him. A crooked grin played about the corners of Dynamite's mouth. Experience had long since told him that the incoming régime would invariably be just as greedy and rotten and tyrannical as the ousted powers.

Along the route many of Vanizona's soldiers dropped into line, as did hundreds of the spectators, so that by the time they reached the palace grounds a veritable mob brought up the rear. On the steps before the statue of Miguel Ortiz they were met by Vanizona who surlily surrendered his sword to Carrera. The general bowed and placed the blade in Dynamite's hands.

"Why to me?" demanded the *Americano*.

"To you we are indebted for our gr-reat victory. You shall be dictator until the election can be arranged. I shall then be a candidate."

"Hell, no! This dictator business is your job. I wouldn't have it on a Christmas tree," declared Dynamite flatly.

"But *amigo mio*, you cannot refuse all honors. I must insist."

"I desire to be chief of police for just two hours," said Dynamite, after a moment's thought.

"You have but to ask."

"All right! As chief I request that Zovollo and De Vega be arrested and brought before me immediately."

De Vega, overhearing, stepped from the crowd and saluted, and Zovollo was found inside the palace preparing for an immediate departure. Dynamite conducted the pair into a room off the executive chambers, and called in Carrera and several other officers. Vanizona, impelled by curiosity, followed.

"This, gentlemen, is a court-martial," announced Dynamite sententiously. "I shall dispense with even more formalities than you did at my alleged trial," he continued, addressing De Vega and Zovollo. "You are charged with attempting to murder certain high officials of Andador and you stand convicted. Your punishment starts immediately!"

Out upon the palace grounds he led the bewildered prisoners, followed by the even more bewildered spectators. Before the devil-gun they halted and at a motion from Dynamite the soldiers who had been guarding it stepped aside. Carrera was chuckling joyously.

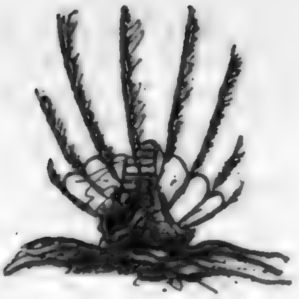
"Last night," declared Dynamite, trying to efface a grin, "we removed two sections of drainage pipe from the street near the *Almirante Pulperia*, and we have not had time to replace them. I hereby sentence you, Zovollo and De Vega, to put 'em back just as they were. After that you have forty-eight hours to pack up."

With a swift motion he stripped the tarpaulin from the devil-gun—and exposed two sections of six-inch drainage pipe crudely wired together, one above the other.

"*Por Dios!*" gasped Vanizona. "But the gun—"

"Whoever sold you that gun, Vanizona," explained Dynamite softly, "forgot to put in a detonator. When we found it wouldn't shoot, we locked it up in another cell in the *cuartel*, and mounted the pipes on the carriage."

Vanizona lifted his hands over his head and clinched his fists, but whether it was a gesture of utter stupefaction, or a petition calling the anathema of the Gods down upon Dynamite's head, it was never known.



Everybody's Meeting PLACE

Where writers, readers and the editor gather for informal discussion

SPRING FEVER

THE editorial offices of EVERYBODY'S are on the twelfth floor of the Butterick Building. From my window I can see the Hudson River with ships constantly leaving for all the ports of the world. When the *Leviathan* goes out she looks bigger than the river itself and I think of the great number of happy people she is carrying to Europe. And I even envy the comparatively small *Fort St. George* as she starts on her turbulent way—it's so apt to be turbulent—to the enchanted islands of Bermuda.

Well, perhaps the next best thing to voyaging oneself is to read about far voyages and distant adventurings. And really, I myself journey gayly, if vicariously, to the many places these stories in EVERYBODY'S carry me.

In this June issue, we are transported in turn, from the South Seas to Japan, from Central America to the mid-Atlantic, from New England to the romantic days of the West.

If you can't go jaunting merrily yourself at least it's a satisfaction to be able to go with some author who knows what he's writing about.

A BAR-KEEP AS CRITIC

I FIND lots of interesting things in the modest little magazines that are devoted to helping budding authors to bud and more experienced authors to come to full flower. One of these is called *The Author and Journalist* and is published in Denver, Colorado. In the pages of a recent issue, Warren Hastings Miller advises authors to consider their readers.

Mr. Miller is a writer who has appeared in many magazines and he is telling about an actual meeting with one of his readers. This particular reader was a bar-keeper on the steamer *Priscilla* which runs between Boston and New York. Miller and the bar-keep fell into a discussion more or less literary.

"And what's become of that fellow who wrote all those Eastern yarns? Miller, I think his name was," asked the bar-keeper.

"I've been in Africa—they ran out of stories in the safe," Miller answered.

"*You!* Shake!" said the bar-keeper and they talked over some of the characters Miller had created.

The bar-keeper was fed up on Western stuff.

"It's all right," he said, "but there ain't no such West nowadays and you and I know it. Let's have somethin' over the edge of the world, where the boys is doin' interestin' things right now."

And now I'll quote Miller directly. He writes:

> Well, the boys are doing interesting things; and the bar-keep's testimony is important. He is Your Reader, you who write for the popular magazines, millions of him, and he has a heart and a starved imagination and a yearning to get his mind off his work and his troubles. Life itself is just one damn thing after another, you know . . . .
>
> So when you put pen to paper don't forget *him*. The American public, taken as a whole, is the most wide-awake, and widely informed, and best educated of them all. You will find more intellectuals in Europe, the average gentleman's son better educated than with us, but their peasant and tradesman class is one dense and soggy mass of stupidity and ignorance. *Our* peasant is an upstanding farmer, with a car and a radio set, and a mind open and curious. *Our* tradesman is a business man on a small scale, wide awake, interested in all the world about him, eager to know more. And presently he grows and becomes a real business man. There is no end to his opportunities. He laps up art and music. The radio is letting him hear everything from jazz to grand opera. Art is growing with him; consider the present quality of the advertisement paintings, the illustrations, the calendars. Not good art, even yet, but far ahead of the chromos of yesteryear. He is growing in appreciation of what is good and what is bad.

It seems to me there's a lot in what Warren Hastings Miller says and that's why I'm glad to quote him.

Of course, too, I was interested in what the bar-keep had to say about Westerns. Perhaps you'll remember that last month I asked in EVERYBODY'S Meeting Place whether or not readers were getting tired of Western stories. I haven't had any answer to that question yet. But there hasn't been time. One difficulty about writing this informal chatter every month is that I have to write it exactly two months before it gets into your hands.

AMONG THOSE PRESENT

THERE are four authors new to the new EVERYBODY'S in this issue: Basil Carey, George Allan England, Frederick J. Jackson, Hurnard Dent.

I am particularly anxious to know what you'll think of George Allan England's story. It breaks rather a fixed editorial rule and, that is, that one can't publish a story in which a crime goes unpunished. I hope I'm not violating Mr. England's confidence in saying he told me EVERYBODY'S was the thirteenth magazine to which he had submitted this story although he himself considered it one of his best stories. This, too, despite the fact that nearly all of his work is snatched up eagerly by editors. Of course, you'll see immediately why this is. Besides breaking that fixed editorial rule, it is such a grim and ironic story. Personally, however, I think it's swell! What's the real objection to publishing a story of this kind occasionally? A little bitter sauce adds zest to the most wholesome meal.

A WRITER WHO SEEKS SECLUSION

FREDERICK J. JACKSON, who wrote that delightful novelette *It Ain't Right!*—how far removed that is from *Johnny Moaner*—has buried himself so securely in the wilds that he won't even let me know where he is. Through his literary agent, however, he has sent me this provocative comment:

> There is one very well known magazine writer, living in a large city, who will be very much surprised if he ever learns that he serves as a "horrible example" to Frederick J. Jackson. This w. k. writer has to bat out stories that will bring him $10,000 a year to keep up with the overhead. The rent he pays would suffice to support two poor families with five children each. He has to keep his nose to the grindstone to keep up with his bills. This writer, some years ago, in a confidential moment, told Jackson that the monthly bills had been paid, and that $76 remained in the bank. It was the first time in years that he had been even that much ahead of inevitable monthly statements.
>
> The thought that struck Jackson was this: "My gosh! Suppose the man ever gets ill?" That deadly rent—and the other bills—
>
> Therefore, Jackson set out to establish himself at the other extreme of living. He sought a wild place where a score of acres could be bought for less than the price per front foot of the average residential lot. He wanted many, many scores of acres. He found rough, timbered mountain land that could be purchased dirt cheap. He discovered that the cheaper the land the more game to be hunted upon it. And after doing some mathematical sums he figured out that *all the land in sight*, at from $2 to $5 an acre, would cost less than a "graveyard-sized" city lot. And city lots do not contain creeks filled with trout. Creeks that have not been fished out by the multitude of tourists that infest the paved highways. Tourists do not care to explore the rough country wherein Jackson and his nice wife have taken up their residence.
>
> PRIVACY! In big letters. A word to conjure

with, in these days. A thing hard to gain. A thing impossible of realization to most people. A vague but cherished dream. The Jacksons have gained it. There are only three ranches within 4 miles—three *inhabited* ranches. There are a dozen abandoned homesteads. The more the merrier—for they mean more privacy. These three ranches are over hills, or young mountains, that discourage visits.

And it is 33 miles to a meat market—part of it over rough mountain roads. The kind of roads where, in spots, an automobile goes five miles an hour and the driver fervently prays that the springs do not break. A storm makes the road absolutely impassable. Therefore, the Jacksons raise their own meat, or shoot game in season. Or go fishing. This price for privacy suits them fine.

And when the weather is too bad for fishing or hunting or other outdoor work, Jackson is forced to work on a magazine story. Therefore, Mrs. Jackson welcomes bad weather.

FROM SASKATCHEWAN

EVERY month, I try to get at least one tremendously humorous story in EVERYBODY'S. This month it's *Toothache,* by Hurnard Dent. Mr. Dent lives in Saskatchewan and writes me this:

Now you are kind enough to wish me to introduce myself, but I hardly know how to begin—I should like to start something like this— "I'm a tall, good-looking gent, what's been raised in the saddle," etc. —but it wouldn't go because I should hate to do Ananias out of his historic occupation, though at times I have been raised in the saddle—so high, I began to really believe that "heaven was my home." So imagine me twirling my hat and standing first on one foot, then the other. Well, here goes. Not having been previously consulted in the matter, I was born in England in the year—well—umpty umph. Though old enough to make a mark on a voting paper I have not yet reached "years of discretion" as defined by a friend of mine once. His explanation of the phrase was as follows—"a feller's reached years of discretion when he ain't good enough ter die, an' is too old ter enjoy his self any more." My people always wanted me to enter the Church, and with that end in view I came to North Western Canada twenty years ago under the ecclesiastical wing of one who has done an enormous amount towards settling up the western provinces—I refer to the present Episcopal head of Saskatchewan—Bishop Lloyd. Where I pitched my first tent, is now part of a fair sized city. My first experiences were an excellent cure for greenness. I was given a pony and some blankets, and told to locate at a small settlement some thirty miles away. In the absence of the familiar roads and signposts of old England, I naturally desired a few directions. I got them! "Oh," said the Bishop, waving his hand vaguely, "you roughly follow the river Saskatchewan." Visions of the well kept tow-paths of home rose before me, and I set off smiling. I soon found there was a catch in it, though. That beastly river didn't act as it should. Instead of a nice little path, there were ravines that stretched miles inland, making one have a detour of many weary miles sometimes, to get round them. However, I got there.

I shall never forget my first service. My "organist" played a violin, but the only "sacred" music he knew was *Star of the East* so one could hardly say the singing was varied. After a while the open spaces claimed me, and no doubt a brilliant young preacher was lost to the Church, though I haven't noticed any particular decay in that institution since I left it. I homesteaded, taking on the famous bet with the government, of $10 against 160 acres, and beat them at the game. Them was the days! The spaces were open indeed, log shacks, and no roads, telephones or fences, and very few neighbors, a splendid country (then) for cattle, at which I tried to make enough to buy beans and tobacco, life's two necessities!

But alas, in those days, it was an Eveless Eden and though now when one looks back, it seems touched with glamor and romance, it was a hard struggle, and lean living.

Like many others, I acted as nurse-maid to my bunch of cattle, till gradually settlement chocked us out and hemmed us in. I came out at the finish with a lot of experience, a sense of humor, and very little else. I have since retreated a little further north, having a temporary holiday, living on the interest of my debts and the scenery. My favorite recreation is riding—when I can stay put. For pets, my taste runs to horses, cats and boys.

Really, I am afraid I must bow myself out, when you people start to yarning, it's time to quit—no—I positively cannot tell you of that adventure of mine, in which a Scotchman NEARLY gave me a drink—

AND TO CLOSE

I CAN'T get everything I want in EVERYBODY'S MEETING PLACE this month. I'd like to quote some letters from readers. I've had all sorts of letters, good, bad and indifferent. Some exhilaratingly encouraging and some extremely discouraging. Perhaps soon, for an issue, I shall turn these pages over entirely to readers and publish both their bricks and their bouquets. Why don't you contribute? Write me whatever you really think. You don't have to say it with flowers.

O. G.

THE NEWS OF NEXT MONTH

Rajah Treasure

The first part of a two-part story of Burma, romantic in nature and yet crowded with excitement. As a welcome change, a girl—the delectable Shahli-Mar—plays the principal part.

By HUBBARD HUTCHINSON

Beast of the BOSVELD

A complete and authentic novelette of South Africa, of a Zulu king, crocodiles and a native uprising by a man who was for years a next door neighbor of the Zulus.

By E. VAN LIER RIBBINK

And Short Stories by

CAPTAIN DINGLE · HUGH PENDEXTER · ARED WHITE

A sea story by Captain Dingle; a perfectly corking Western story by Hugh Pendexter; one of Ared White's best war stories and stories of China, of the North-West, a humorous story of a bibulous rooster and chapters of the serials by Basil Carey and Francis D. Grierson help to make this the best new EVERYBODY'S published so far.

IF YOU WERE FIRED TOMORROW

If the boss came down with a grouch—or you made a mistake—And You GOT FIRED, could you get another job at the same pay right away? Or would you have to go job-hunting like any ordinary untrained man who gets fired? Think it over! If you are tired of being a cog in a machine—or tired of working in an uncertain, 2x4-inch job with no future—here is a real opportunity! Read about it—it may be the big turning point of your whole career!

Stop Gambling With Your Future and LEARN ELECTRICITY

WHERE JOBS HUNT MEN AT $50 A WEEK AND UP

LET me make you a real money-maker. Let me take you out of the "hired-help" class—and start you on the road to real success, in 90 days. Make up your mind to say good-bye forever to precarious, tiresome, routine jobs—crabby bosses—and low pay that can never be more than $35 or $40 a week! You don't need to tolerate them any longer!

Amazing Opportunity

Electricity is calling for trained men—and Coyne 12-week graduates are among the preferred class. Many of them have stepped out of our doors into wonderful jobs paying from $50 and up to $200 a week! And our free employment bureau helps to secure positions for others.

Learn Without Lessons

Electricity is surprisingly easy to learn this practical way *without* books or dry lessons. That's the secret of Coyne training. All training consists of *ACTUAL* and *PRACTICAL* work on fine big electrical equipment—dynamos, transformers, etc. (Real ones—not models). You learn by *doing*—and experts work right with you every step of the way.

COYNE H. C. Lewis, President, Dept. A 7-39
ELECTRICAL SCHOOL 1300-10 W. Harrison St.
CHICAGO, ILL.

I PAY YOUR R. R. FARE

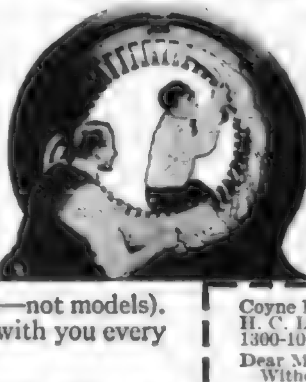
Right now I am making a special offer to pay any man's railroad fare to Chicago from any point in the U. S., upon enrollment. Send coupon for details.

No Experience or Education Needed!

Practically any man can master the "ins-and-outs" of Electricity—as taught in the Great Shops of Coyne. You don't need one bit of previous experience or any more than common-school education. Any number of our highly successful graduates never completed eighth grade.

2 Extra Courses FREE

If you act now—I'll not only pay your railroad fare to Chicago—but I'll give you two big, extra courses absolutely without charge—RADIO and AUTOMOTIVE ELECTRICITY. Furthermore, I'll help you to locate a *part-time job while learning!* FREE employment service after graduation, too. We help place men in wonderful jobs every week!



Send for FREE Book

Just give me a chance to tell you about the wonderful things that Electricity has in store for you after 12 happy weeks at COYNE. Send the coupon for my free, illustrated book containing over 150 photographs and details of my special offer. No obligation. Mail it today!

BIG BOOK FREE

Coyne Electrical School,
H. C. Lewis, Pres., Dept. A 7-39,
1300-10 W. Harrison St., Chicago, Ill.

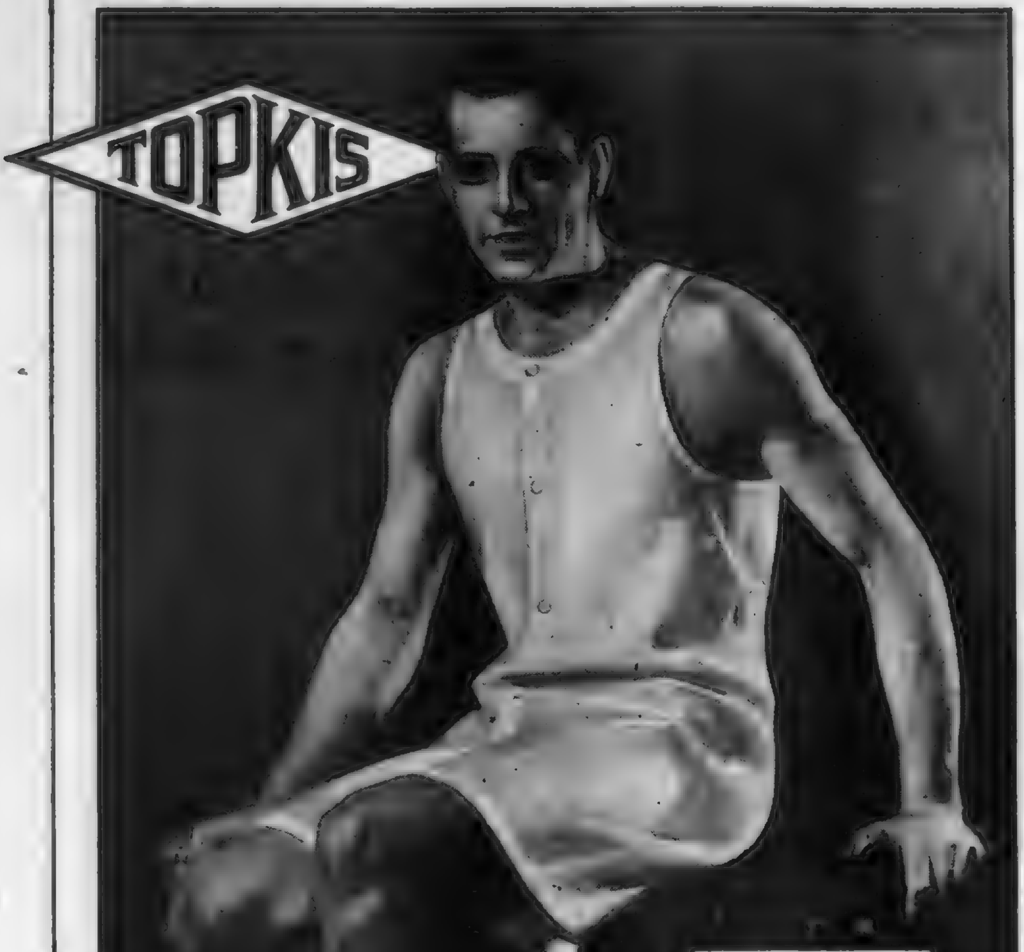
Dear Mr. Lewis:
Without obligation, send me your free illustrated catalog and details of your R. R. Fare offer.

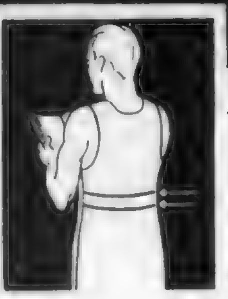
Name..

Address..

City......................State..............

EVERYBODY'S
June, 1927
Published monthly by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $2.50 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Aug. 16, 1899, at the Post-Office at New York, N.Y., additional entry at Brooklyn, New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.
Volume LVI
Number 6





Reinforced Back

The seams at waistline are made unbreakable, by the Topkis Flatlock stitch of nine threads instead of one.

Say "Topkis"!
pay One Dollar

COMFORT comes first; then price. You can settle both, when you buy union suits, by saying "Topkis". This name means the right design for an athletic union suit; fit and comfort, fine fabric, expert tailoring and finish; long wear . . . All the satisfaction a man can take in fine underwear! And all for the Dollar Price!—because Topkis sells by the millions. Ask your dealer for Dollar Topkis.

Fine, durable fabrics: Fancy madras, plain madras, white or color stripe, silk stripes, mercerized crepe, pajama check.

Write us for free illustrated booklet

TOPKIS BROTHERS COMPANY, Wilmington, Del.
General Sales Offices: 93 Worth Street, at Broadway, New York

Men's Union Suits, $1; Shirts and Drawers, 75c each. Boys' Union Suits, 75c. Children's Waist Union Suits, 50c and 75c. In Canada, Men's Union Suits, $1.50.

AT THE TOP OF UNDERWEAR FAME STANDS THE TOPKIS NAME

HAVE A CAMEL

To you—experienced smokers . . .

EXPERIENCED smokers, your patronage puts Camel first among cigarettes.

You know good tobaccos. From their taste and fragrance, you know that Camels are rolled of the choicest Turkish and Domestic tobaccos grown.

Your preference proves it. You've paid every price and tried every brand, and you will smoke only Camels. Camel popularity — your vote — shows that Camel is totally unlike any other cigarette that ever was made.

You are also steady smokers, and you have paid Camel the highest compliment: "No matter how liberally we smoke them, Camels never tire the taste. They never leave a cigaretty after-taste."

Experienced smokers, your patronage enables us to produce the best. We spare no expense, we buy the best of everything for Camels because we dare look forward to your appreciation. And you give it beyond all bounds!

There's only one thing more we could ask. Pass the good news to inexperienced smokers. Help them shorten the search for tobacco enjoyment. Extend them the most friendly —because the most helpful—smoke invitation ever spoken—

"Have a Camel!"

R. J. REYNOLDS TOBACCO COMPANY, WINSTON-SALEM, N. C.

© 1927

Chew DENTYNE *and smile!*

DENTYNE
CHEWING GUM
5¢
5¢
KEEPS THE TEETH WHITE

IT'S your smile that makes people like you—not your frown. And your teeth are a big part of your smile. Teeth form the background. Keep your teeth attractive—a flash of snowy white behind your smile. Chew Dentyne, the gum that keeps breath sweet, teeth clean and pearly white.

· KEEPS THE TEETH WHITE ·

Neglect takes a high toll

4 out of 5 *invite Pyorrhea*

Dread Pyorrhea, with its host of serious ills, does not come uncalled for. It comes as the guest of Neglect and Carelessness.

And four persons out of five after forty (and thousands younger) contract Pyorrhea. Often serious diseases follow, destroying health, beauty and youth.

You need have no fear of this vicious foe. If your gums are tender and bleeding, see your dentist at once. And start using Forhan's for the Gums.

Used regularly and in time, Forhan's wards off Pyorrhea or checks its vicious course. It firms the gums and keeps them healthy. It protects teeth against acids which cause decay. It keeps them snowy white.

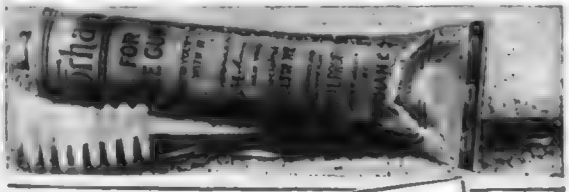
It is the formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S., and contains Forhan's Pyorrhea Liquid, used by dentists everywhere.

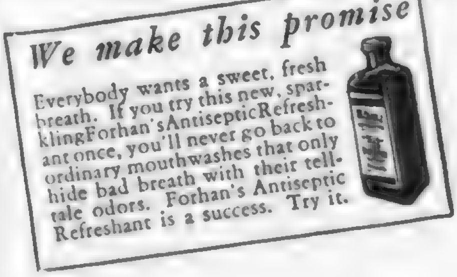
Safeguard your health! See your dentist twice a year. Start using Forhan's regularly morning and night. Teach your children this good habit. Play safe—get a tube today. At all druggists, 35c and 60c.

Formula of R. J. Forhan, D. D. S.
Forhan Company, New York

Forhan's *for the gums*

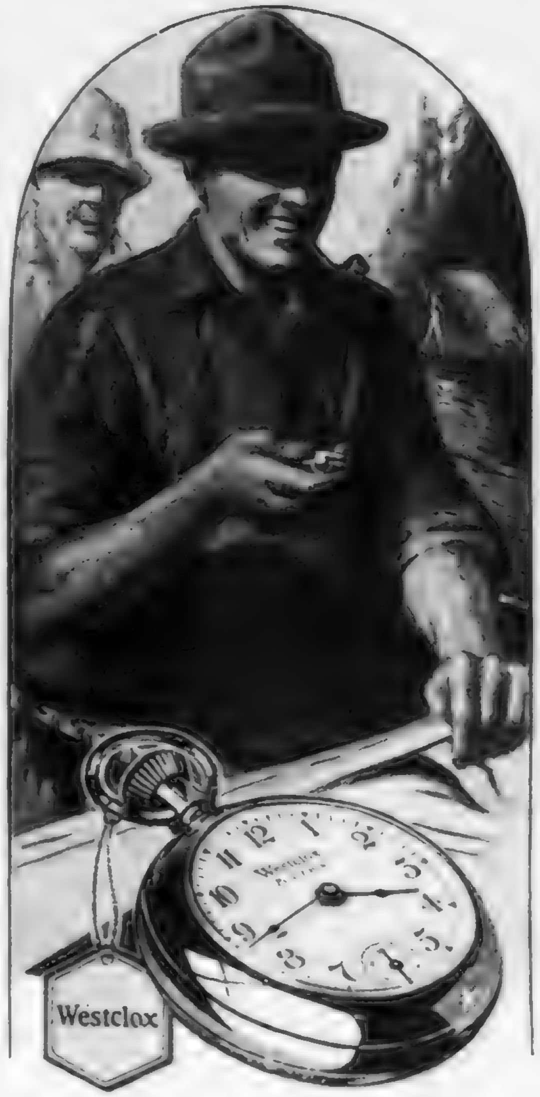
MORE THAN A TOOTH PASTE . . *IT CHECKS PYORRHEA*





We make this promise

Everybody wants a sweet, fresh breath. If you try this new, sparklingForhan's AntisepticRefreshant once, you'll never go back to ordinary mouthwashes that only hide bad breath with their telltale odors. Forhan's Antiseptic Refreshant is a success. Try it.



for vacation time

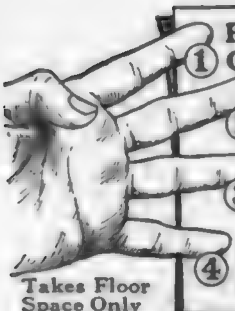
Pocket Ben

WHATEVER you do, wherever you go, you need a reliable watch that's sturdy enough for a vigorous outdoor life.

Pocket Ben is that kind. He'll help you plan your days and hours to get the most fun out of the shortest time.

Sold everywhere for $1.50. With luminous day-and-night dial, $2.25.

WESTERN CLOCK COMPANY
La Salle, Illinois



① PROFITS UP TO $675 OR MORE A MONTH

② SALES INCREASED 100% TO 400%

③ ICE BILLS CUT 33¹/₃% TO 66²/₃%

④ SAVINGS UP TO 80% IN CLERK HIRE

Takes Floor Space Only 3 Ft. Square

"LIQUID" BOTTLE COOLER

Now Clearing $10 to $30 a Day for—

Candy Stores, Cigar Stores, Grocers, Roadside Stands, Auto Camps, Theatres, Play Grounds, Fair Grounds, Summer Resorts, Excursion Boats, Dance Pavilions, Amusement Parks, Carnivals, Ball Parks, Railroad Stations, Office Bldg. Lobbies, Hotel Lobbies, Chain Stores, General Stores, Delicatessen Stores, Billiard Parlors, Bowling Alleys, [illegible] Stations, Garages, Waiting Rooms, Clubs, Golf Courses, Cafeterias, Coffee Shops, Lunch Rooms, Bathing Beaches, Ice Cream Parlors, Drug Stores, Etc.

OUT COMES A COLD ONE
PUSH A WARM BOTTLE IN

New, Fast Way of Selling Bottled Drinks

WHETHER you sell bottled drinks or have been passing up these profits because of the muss and bother of old fashioned methods, read how the "Liquid" Bottler Cooler makes drink selling as quick, clean, and easy as handing out candy bars.

No more unsanitary ice chests—no more sloppy tubs of ice water—no more wet floors or cold hands. In the "Liquid" Bottle Cooler 144 bottles are always sorted by flavors—a separate cooling tube for each—8 tubes in all—and every one always filled with cold bottles in an ice water bath—quickest cooling method known. To serve any flavor, take warm bottle from reserve rack, push it in proper tube and out comes a cold bottle on the other side. You can't get a cold bottle out until you push a warm one in, so you can't run short. A glance at reserve rack tells you which flavors are getting low and when to reorder.

Ice Savings Pay For It

"Sold 58 cases 1 day—profit $26.10," writes O. S. Station, Texas. Robins, Philadelphia, says, "Ice savings paid for Cooler many times over." White, Dallas, says, "Ice consumption dropped from 125 lbs. a day to 50 lbs. a day — 60% savings." Martin, Minneapolis, says, "Saves me $15 a week in clerk hire."

Send for "Liquid Profits" Free

Read other amazing proofs in new Book "Liquid Profits." Shows photos of actual installations. Reproduction of Saturday Evening Post color ads about "Liquid" Bottle Coolers—ads that are telling millions why to buy bottled drinks from dealers who serve them this new way.

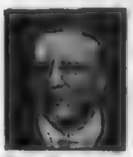
"Liquid" Bottle Cooler looks like $200 to $500 value yet costs only $100 on easy terms. One man paid entire purchase price from first 5 days' profits! Big drink season is at hand—get all the facts now.

Liquid Bottle Cooler

Send This to
The Liquid Carbonic Corporation,
Dept. F-5, 3100 S. Kedzie Ave., Chicago, Ill.
for Free Book "Liquid Profits" and Easy Terms on The "Liquid" Bottle Cooler.

Name..
Street..
City..
My Business is..................................
My Bottler is....................................

Hair Analysis FREE



Pres. Roosevelt
One of Prof. Scholder's many famous patients

IF YOU ARE TROUBLED **with falling** ha r, **itching scalp, or dandruff, send a sample** your hair (ordinary combings will do) to Profes Maurice Scholder, the renowned scalp specialist for FREE test. Professor Scholder will then d you a personal report, with recommendatio for your **individual case.** There is no cha for this analysis. It places you under no obli ion whatever. Thousands of men and women have been cure scalp ailments and baldness by following the advice of this famo pecialist.

FREE ANALYSIS COUPON:
Mail today, enclosing samples of your h

PROFESSOR SCHOLDER INSTITUTE A.F.-5
101 W. 42nd St., New York, N. Y.

Name...Age.........
Address...
City..State..........

If You Are A MAN

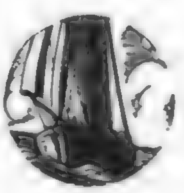
worthy of the name and not afraid to work. I'll bet you $50 that you can't work for us 30 d and earn less than $200. Think I'm bluffi Then answer this ad and show me up. Op ings for Managers. The "Wonder Box" s on sight.

TOM WALKER
DEPT. 43 . . . PITTSBURGH, PA.

CALIFORNIA ROSE DIAMOND FREE

To all Gem-Lovers answering this ad we will send this month **ABSOLUTELY FREE**, all charges prepaid, a one carat perfect cut and polished **CALIFORNIA ROSE DIAMOND** of exquisite beauty. We do this to advertise our marvelous **NEW GEM** the **CALIFORNIA STEEL BLUE DIAMOND**, not a genuine diamond but positively matching **SIDE BY SIDE** the finest $500.00 first water diamond in cut-brilliancy, and dazzling rainbow fire. Amazingly low in price, brilliancy guaranteed for life. **Mail postal today** for **FREE GEM** and actual photos of Steel Blue Diamond.

California Diamond Co., Dept. 11, Monterey, Cal.



There's always a Story *of the* Sea *in* ADVENTURE

Twice a Month . . . *25c.*

PISO'S *for* **coughs**

Quick Relief! A pleasant effective syrup
35c and 60c sizes
And *externally* use PISO'S
Throat and Chest Salve 35c

Dries overnight

never damp, soft

ANNOYING! to have your tooth brush damp, oversoft—"dead"—every morning.

The Pebeco Tooth Brush—ventilated—dries overnight. You'll find it always firm, "live." And its *two tufts* reach every part of your teeth. All druggists.

Made only by Pebeco, Inc., Bloomfield, N. J.

PEBECO
VENTILATED
Tooth Brush

Accounting
—THE CONTROL OF BUSINESS

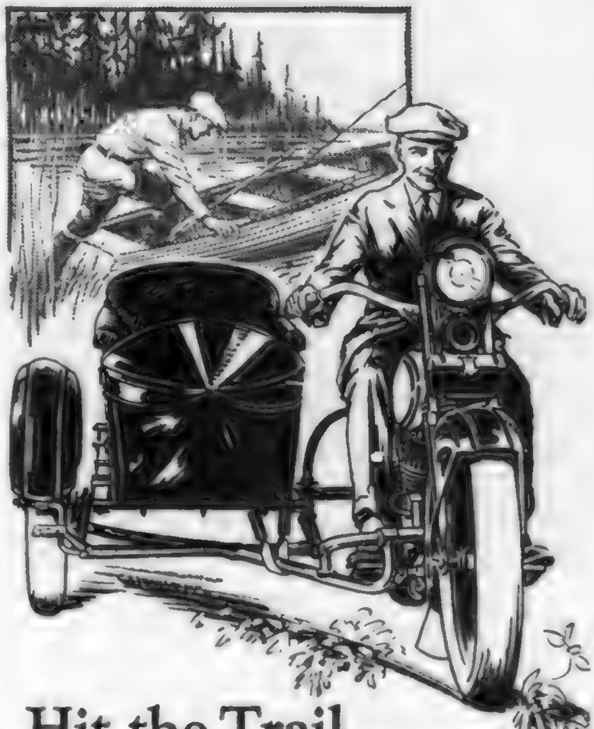
ACCOUNTANCY

Accountants command big income. Thousands needed. About 9,000 Certified Public Accountants in U. S. Many earn $5,000 to $20,000. We train you thoroly at home in your spare time for C. P. A. examinations or executive accounting positions. Previous bookkeeping knowledge unnecessary—we prepare you from ground up. Our training is supervised by Wm. B. Castenholz, A. M., C. P. A., assisted by staff of C. P. A.'s. Low cost—easy terms. Write now for valuable 64 page book free.

This Book FREE!

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 676-H, Chicago

SKIN BLEMISHES
pimples, blackheads, etc., cleared away easily and at little cost by
Resinol



Hit the Trail ...to Joyland!

SLIP away from crowded streets and stifling heat. Spend never-to-be-forgotten hours at the lake, on the beach, in the breeze-cooled country. Short spins. Long trips. Picnics—outings—vacation tours. All yours with the powerful, dependable Harley-Davidson Twin. Upkeep is only a fraction the cost of a car—2¢ per mile for gas, oil, tires and all. Plenty of room in the side-car for a friend and your outfit. Prices as low as $310 f. o. b. factory—on easy Pay-As-You-Ride terms. See your dealer—

Send coupon for Catalog.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. A. F. Milwaukee, Wis.

The Single—our famous solo mount that travels "80 miles per gallon" and is priced at only $235, complete, f. o. b. factory.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON
Motorcycles

Twin and Single-cylinder models in a wide range of prices. Get our catalcg.

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO.
Dept. A. F., Milwaukee, Wis.
Interested in ☐ Twin ☐ Single
send illustrated catalog.

Name..
Address.......................................
....

Ingersoll

WRIST WATCH $3.50

For anyone who drives

Once you've worn a wrist watch for a week, you'd as soon be without it as without a speedometer.

AND if you had time to test all the wrist watches in actual motoring use, you'd decide on an Ingersoll. For several reasons:

(1) Vibration and the jolts and jars of driving don't affect the timing dependability of an Ingersoll the way they do the higher priced, delicate watches.

(2) In case of an accident to your watch, you can get it repaired quickly and at *nominal cost*, by sending it to the INGERSOLL SERVICE DEPARTMENT at Waterbury, Conn.

(3) In case of loss or theft, it can be easily replaced, almost anywhere, at one of the hundred thousand stores that sell Ingersolls.

Price $3.50. Wrist Radiolite, tells time in the dark, $4.00. The extra 50c would be the second best investment you ever made.

INGERSOLL WATCH CO., Inc.

New York · Chicago · San Francisco · Montreal

Service Dept.: Waterbury, Connecticut

Green Jade

Just a tiny green jade figure, exquisitely carved, what a wealth of meaning it held for third-mate Johnny, when he found it on shore leave. Read the complete novelette by W. Townend in the June 1st issue.

And also

On the Skyliner, a whirring story of the air by Thomson Burtis; *The Drums Roll*, a story of warfare by Ernest Haycox; further chapters of *Wastrel*, that engrossing story of the Pacific by Gordon Young; Part III of *A New Found World*, an epic tale of discovery by Roger Pocock.

All these, and more, in ADVENTURE for June 1st, on sale everywhere at 25c.

Adventure

Published Twice a Month — the 1st and 15th

The Food of a Thousand Uses!

BECAUSE cooperation, like better bread, benefits everyone—a group of ninety non-competitive wholesale bread bakers throughout the United States are working together in the Quality Bakers of America on a cooperative basis in the interests of baking better bread and giving better service to retail grocers and the great bread-consuming public.

"Better Bread Benefits Everyone," and the insignia of the Quality Bakers of America on a bread wrapper is assurance of fresh, nutritious bread. And bread today is better than ever before in the history of the country. It is an everyday, every-meal need — the food of a thousand uses!

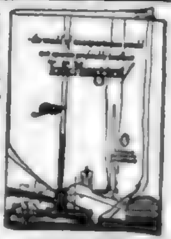
Executive Committee

MEMBER
QUALITY
BAKERS
AMERICA
By Invitation Only

QUALITY BAKERS
OF AMERICA
469 Fifth Ave., New York City

"Better Bread Benefits Everyone"

OPPORTUNITIES IN
TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT



Conditions point to an unusual demand for trained traffic men, by transportation companies and industrial organizations. Men with scientific traffic training effect big savings for their firms—command big salaries.

Three Detroit Firms Pay Their Traffic Managers Over $20,000 a Year

Prepare at home in your spare time, under supervision of traffic experts. Low cost; easy terms. "I would not take $5,000 for my knowledge of traffic management," writes H. E. Stiffler, Traffic Manager, Marion Steam Shovel Co., Marion, Ohio. Send now for 64-page book— **FREE!**

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 576-T, Chicago

Fishermen!

Sportsman's Digest
Sportsman's Digest

3 BIG ISSUES 10¢

Read Sportsman's Digest, famous fishing magazine. Fishing, hunting, trapping stories and pictures; information, tips, successful secrets, on tackle, guns, dogs, all outdoor sports. Special advtg. offer—send 10c coin or stamps, with name and address, for 3 months' subscription.

SPORTSMAN'S DIGEST
Dept. 1-F Cincinnati, Ohio

You can be quickly cured, if you
STAMMER

Send 10 cents for 288-page book on Stammering and Stuttering, **"Its Cause and Cure."** It tells how I cured myself after stammering 20 yrs. **B. N. Bogue, 2386 Bogue Bldg., 1147 N. Ill. St., Indianapolis.**

W. L. DOUGLAS

$5 to $8 Shoes for Men

Smart Russia Brogue, correctly styled *for right now* $7

The Proof of a Shoe is in the wearing of it

That explains why, for half a century, W. L. Douglas shoes have won an ever increasing patronage.

W. L. Douglas shoes have always given the best—in style, comfort, service and value. The oxford shown here is a typical example of what $7.00 will buy in a Douglas shoe.

Men's Shoes $5 to $8
Women's Shoes $5 and $6
Boys' Shoes $4 and $5

AMERICA'S BEST KNOWN SHOES

W. L. Douglas stores in principal cities and shoe dealers everywhere are now showing new Douglas styles

W. L. DOUGLAS SHOE COMPANY
Brockton, Massachusetts

Prove your claim to the greatest treasure in the world!

R. L. Stevenson
Thackeray
Owen Wister
Dickens
Willa Cather
Achmed Abdullah
Eugene O'Neill
George du Maurier
George Meredith
Bret Harte
Walter Pater
O. Henry
de Maupassant
Hugo
Mérimée
Mark Twain
Lagerlöf
Tolstoi
Hans Andersen
Daudet
Hawthorne
Henry James
Sudermann
Davis
James Stephens
Baudelaire
Lafcadio Hearn
Somerset Maugham
Lewis Carroll

The Golden Book Magazine

THE masters of the magic word have left rich treasure behind them. In ages remote, in lands far lying, they have been at work, transmuting the crispness of adventure, the sun-warmed perfume of romance into bright minted gold of literature—the only coin in the world which can always buy you happiness.

And from this treasure-trove the GOLDEN BOOK chooses its contents each month—stories, verse, bits of humor, wisdom, which you would choose yourself if you had time and opportunity.

This trust fund of literature is yours by right of inheritance. And the GOLDEN BOOK is the interest due you each month. Establish your claim by signing the coupon below.

"I ALWAYS MEANT TO READ THAT—BUT"

and you explain that business keeps you tied down—social obligations leave you little time to read, not much money to spend on books.——

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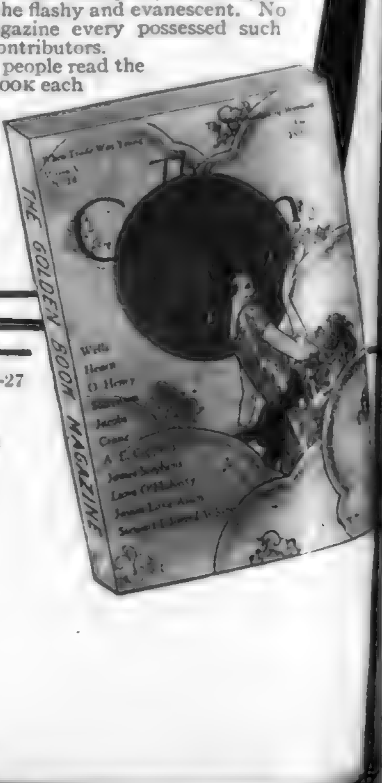

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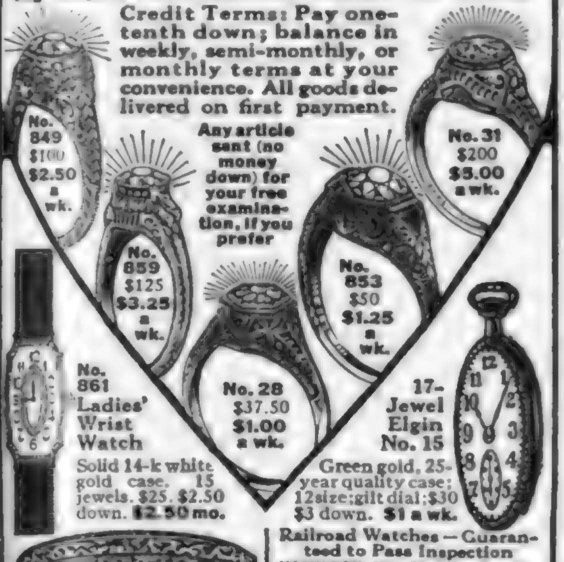

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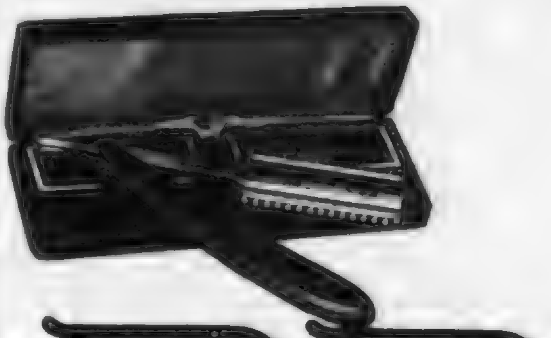

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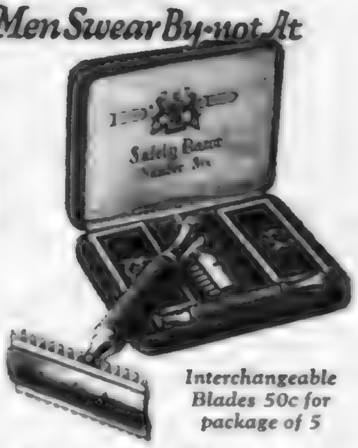

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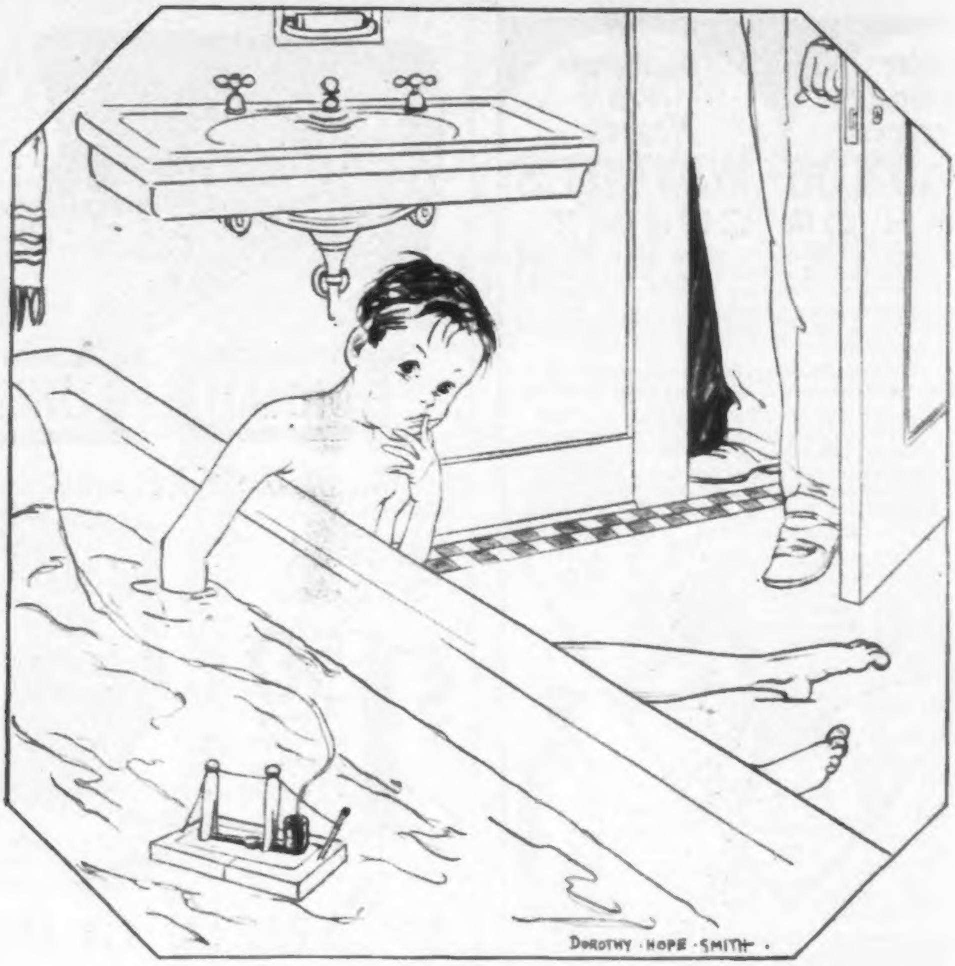

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